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' . . . To die—to sleep—
No more : and, by a sleep, to say, we end
The heartache, and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to : 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep—
To sleep !—perchance to dream !—aye, there's the rub ;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause :—there's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life ;
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,
The insolence of office, and the spurns
That patient merit of the unworthy takes . . .
But that the dread of something after death
 That undiscovered country, from whose bourn
No traveller returns) puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have,
Than fly to others that we know not of ?'

SHAKESPEARE.

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The Master Sinner

PART I

CONCERNING THE TIDINGS

Not only for those persons who are interested in Theosophy and the many 'isms which were the forerunners, or are either the legitimate or even the irregular offspring of this form of superstition, but for the world at large—that is, the followers of each and every faith, and also those persons who have no faith in a future existence—these Letters from Hell are now for the first time given to publicity, word for word as they were received, at a stated interval, by

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Anthony T. Grigg—himself previously a non-believer in spiritualism and a pronounced agnostic.

It may be well here to state the by no means peculiar circumstances that led to this gentleman being the recipient of correspondence of so extraordinary and unexpected a character, from a Principality with which we have no postal arrangements, and no apparent means of communication ; which geographically we cannot situate ; and which, prior to the arrival of the first epistle, was held in profound contempt by Anthony Grigg, and regarded by him as a mere invention of the early Christians, now made use of by the clergy in order that they may set up a (spurious) right for their means of subsistence and employ the terrors that such a place as hell affords to the ignorant and superstitious, as a whip wherewith to scourge humanity and drive

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it, like a flock of sheep, along that pathway which leads nowhither, but keeps their—the priests’—self-voiced calling ever prominent and ever well financed (by means of the threat of the counter road) with a handsome percentage of the contents of the purses belonging to the blind and terrified multitude. In a word, Anthony Grigg regarded the name ‘Hell’ as an instrument of blackmail—which was perpetually in use—in the, to his mind, unscrupulous hands of the ecclesiastics.

Now, Anthony Grigg—a somewhat eccentric character, perhaps because he was a philosopher and a searcher after Truth—resided in a tumble-down garret in the neighbourhood of Drury Lane, with his sole friend and companion, a man of considerable and highly-cultivated genius, one Thomas Trelawny by name. These two gentlemen had some trifling

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means between them, and were careless alike as to the condition and fashion of their clothing and the quality and quantity of their food. They were each not unlike a latter-day Diogenes, in that each was a sage and his habitation was but little better than a tub.

In order to be a sage—a judge of something more than abstract philosophy, I mean a judge of human nature—one must have been more than a student of humanity in his youth; he must have deftly fingered the heartstrings of humanity and sounded its moral and mental ranges in their entirety; he must have tasted of human nature's joys, its sorrows, its godliness, its depravity, its heights of success and its depths of despair. Anthony Grigg and Thomas Trelawny, in their young days, had drunk deeply out of the cups which contain these diverse potions. They *actually* had loved,

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had been jilted ; had experienced the glow of happiness which pulses the heart of one who has sacrificed himself for the sake of another, and had shuddered with the thrill of horror which convulses the breast of one who has wilfully wronged an innocent man ; now had, in guilelessness, smiled back at a smiling world, and anon had intentionally wallowed in the mire of sin and corruption.

Under these circumstances they may not have been very desirable companions, but at anyrate they courted no further companionship than their own, and they had done much good and committed many crimes with always the one object in view—that of becoming sages, judges of humanity. And they had fully succeeded.

Then—in their dual solitude—they attempted to solve the *hitherto* insoluble. They strove to learn the Beginning of

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all things. And—philosophers though they undoubtedly were—they were forced to acknowledge that their philosophy was incapable of elucidating the great mystery. They could disprove much—but they could prove *nothing*.

Thus they became agnostics.. They could not believe the popularly-accepted theory of the origin of the universe, still they were open to conviction if another Beginning should be shown them. But they wanted *proof*. There must be no slurring the question, no missing links in the chain of evidence. Needless to state, no further elucidation came. They remained agnostics.

Then they turned their attention to the future—*La Mort—et après*. But they were still agnostics, and so they laughed to scorn every preconceived notion of Heaven and Hell, of Everlasting Life, of the Reincarnation of Souls, of any-

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thing save Death, their bodies rotting in the ground, and mayhap serving to throw extra strength into the blades of grass above them.

And said Thomas Trelawny to Anthony Grigg, in contemptuous jest, on the 14th day of April 1890, ‘When I die, if the event happens before you shake off mortality for dust, I will send you a series of letters from hell.’ Then they both chuckled derisively, and continued their researches into the origin and evolution of the horse.

‘The next morning Thomas Trelawny lay dead upon his sheetless mattress.

And upon the anniversary of his friend’s death Anthony Grigg found a scroll of manuscript upon his writing-table when he rose at break of day. The scroll was of an odd substance, neither vellum, nor

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paper, nor cloth; it had more of the appearance of indiarubber than of anything else.

Anthony Grigg—being a philosopher—was not the man to express, or even to be taken by, surprise at the most astounding things, but upon unrolling the MS. he fell, without uttering a syllable, upon the carpetless floor. His face turned livid, hideous, his terror-stricken eyeballs protruded, he gnashed his teeth and bit through his tongue, and his long finger-nails pierced deeply into the palms of his hands; he rolled over and over, shaking convulsively, writhing and wriggling like a shot dog in the agonies of death, and the foam spurted from his mouth, covering his wrinkled, yellow face with a snow-white lather.

He had merely glanced at the heading of the MS. It was ‘HELL.’ And the signature—‘THOMAS TRELAWNY.’

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And the entire manuscript, inclusive of the signature, which was written in white upon a black ground, was unmistakably in the handwriting of his dead friend.

How long the terrible fit lasted neither Anthony Grigg nor any other living creature could tell, for he had overturned the little clock which stood upon the table, as he fell forward and rolled upon the floor. At anyrate, when he awoke—as it seemed to him, from an appalling dream—his garret was quite dark, and the hour might have been any of the night.

Anthony Grigg's nerves had suffered severely from the fearful shock brought about by the discovery of his friend's Letters from Hell. His self-confidence had deserted him, he had not sufficient

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moral courage merely to call out to the other inhabitants of the tumble-down building.

He dragged himself to a sitting posture, by means of the bed leg; and so, eventually, by easy stages, he regained his feet.

He shuffled towards the mantelpiece, shaking in every limb: he was like a man recovering from the effects of alcoholic poisoning.

Then he groped about for a match-box with his aching, trembling fingers. He struck a light and applied it to the candle standing before the dilapidated looking-glass.

Involuntarily his eyes sought his own reflection.

Anthony Grigg was fifty-nine years old, with a prematurely careworn countenance, caused by much study. But his hair had remained throughout life of a coal-

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black hue, and it hung in a tangled mass about his shoulders and down his bent back.

Now, what remained of it was white, shadeless. It hung from his head in repulsive patches. His beard, too, once—but a little while ago—so black and full and flowing, was white, matted, and irregular.

He looked closer upon this horrible, revolting sight which the looking-glass disclosed, and perceived clots of congealed blood about his head and face.

In his agony he had torn the hair out in handfuls. There was much yet sticking to his blood-stained, lacerated hands.

He looked—and shuddered at his own image.

Then he took up the candle and tottered to the writing-table.

The manuscript still lay there.

He felt that he was indirectly about

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to hold converse with Satan. He told himself that he was now destined to learn the eventual fate of his own soul.

He took up the MS. and spread it before him, reading it through, with his arms crossed upon his breast, rocking himself to and fro with a terrible monotony, as though someone had aimed a blow with some sharp instrument which had lacerated his bosom, and he himself, without avail, strove to allay the intensity of his sufferings.

This is what he read,—

LETTER THE FIRST.

‘ HELL.

DEAR FRIEND ANTHONY,

‘ We little thought when I spoke—in the merest jest—of writing letters to you from hence, that I should be called away by the ruler of

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this Eternal City, to fulfil my promise to you. We little thought that there was—nay, we were almost certain that there was *not* any future life, and, as a natural consequence, that there was neither heaven nor hell. *Now* you will know, as I know, that we — poor, foolish mortals, proud of our scepticism, relying on our own weak intellect, revelling in our defiance of, and wilfully jeering at, the Unknown—were wofully in error. We howled for *proof*, and because it was not forthcoming we would not believe. Nevertheless we, in our agnosticism, were but little further from the truth than the believers in the hundred and one different religions on the face of our planet. Hell has never been pictured aright.

‘I have learnt much since the great and omnipotent Presence, whom we blasphemously spoke of as “Diabolus,

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the non-existent," took me away from the flesh, bones, and skin in which I had temporary habitation. But of two things I have, and shall have, no knowledge whatever. The one is the flight of time. We have no night, no time, no death here; it is the infinite, the everlasting; consequently I know not when you will receive this letter which the great and omnipotent Presence has commanded me, in pursuance of my promise to you, to write with my soul—that is myself, Anthony—for we have no forms, and no fingers hold my pen; indeed, I have no pen, my soul speaks out, and—it is written. The other thing of which I have no knowledge is, briefly, motion beyond hell. The movements of anything, any planet or any mortal upon it, without the outer gate, are a blank to me. And, strange as it may seem to you in your mortality, I have no

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wish to learn aught of the doings of the universe, for I have but one universe now, and that is—hell.

‘Therefore, Anthony, I repeat, I know not how long this message will take in passing to you, or by what means it will reach you. I only know that the great and omnipotent Presence has commanded me to outpour it from my soul, and that it must eventually find your hands, for we—the souls in hell—one and all *trust* our Prince, the great and omnipotent Presence, and love and worship him.

“Now, Anthony, I wish to refer once again to our searchings after truth. You remember, doubtless, that we took up our stand upon—what we believed to be an impregnable rock — agnosticism, and before taking this step we thoroughly sifted every grain of written work which might serve as evidence to prove or

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disprove the existence of hell or heaven. You remember, doubtless, our earnest conversations and arguments for and against the truth of the great conflict in heaven, when the—to our minds—mystic spirit named, from the Greek, “Diabolus” and differently rendered as “adversary,” “slanderer,” “accuser,” with his hosts (a legion of angels) rebelled, made a desperate effort to usurp the power of God, and was ultimately overcome by the loyal hosts and ignominiously cast out with all the angels, who so courageously fought under his command for a better rule and for a better ruler—himself. We said to ourselves, “This is mythology. Before we believe we must have *proof*.” Well, Anthony, I now know, for I have heard it in the sweet, melodious accents of the great and omnipotent Presence, that there actually was such a conflict and that

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the fight was very terrible, his own hosts only being forced to surrender by superior numbers, at the point of the sword of fire. But he the fools on earth call “Diabolus” fought not from any base desire to possess mere power—he had much, he was a hierarch in heaven, having under his command “thrones, dominations, princedoms, virtues, powers,” before he stirred his faithful angels to revolt—but from a strong and firmly-based conviction that the Deity had abused his sovereignty and had failed to exercise his rule in kingly fashion.

‘And although the tide of the holy battle turned against him and he was hustled from the gates of the city in which he once had been second only to the King, he knew that he had attempted that which was good, had struck a blow at misrule and oppression, and in his call

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to arms had trumpeted the holy cry of "Liberty and Justice."

'With this proud knowledge he went forth escorted by his host of angels--winging through space--to seek another position in the vista of eternity wherein he might find a city greater even than the wondrous, everlasting one from which, immortal though he was, he had been expelled. He lighted on such a position as filled him with a keen delight. It was hell. But make no mistake, Anthony, it was not the hell that mortals in their superstitious ignorance imagine it to be --a hell of fire and brimstone. It was unformed, unbuilded, there was no silence, neither was there the music of heaven ; the tempests raged about it ; it was disorder, chaos, and darkness ;—but the omnipotent Presence (for he *is* omnipotent in hell) of his infinite wisdom chose it.

'Now, although the King had cast

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his Prince from heaven, he was incapable of depriving him of one iota of the illimitable knowledge which he possessed, or of that marvellous power which was second only to his own. So the Prince, by the same means that the Deity made unto himself a heaven, created a hell. By one glance of his wondrous eyes, by one breath of his nostrils, by one wave of his shining hand, and by one sound of his indescribably melodious voice, he silenced the tempest and shattered the darkness by an immeasurable sheet of dazzling light.

'A thousand years to him, an immortal, were—and still are—but as a moment, and so (perhaps in a moment, perhaps in æons, I know not how long according to the times of earth) with the fulness of his own power, aided by his hosts, he builded a city upon the lines of that city out of which he had gone for ever, but, profiting

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by that experience which he had gained as prince in heaven, he made it infinitely more beautiful even than heaven itself. . . .'

Anthony Grigg, as he read on, gradually grew calmer and ceased the swaying movement of his body. He paused at the conclusion of the foregoing sentence, and fell into a deep train of thought. Now that the first shock of the receipt of this letter from hell had worn off somewhat, he became once again his own calm, philosophical self. 'So hell is a greater paradise than heaven,' he mused; 'and Satan is worshipped by the souls that have entered its portals—as God is looked upon in heaven, so is this great, omnipotent Presence, of which Thomas Trelawny's soul speaks, regarded in hell.'

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He passed his handkerchief across his brow, which was yet clammy with the sweat of terror that had previously broken out upon it. ‘There is no fire and brimstone,’ ‘There is no fire and brimstone ;’ he kept mentally repeating the words. At least he was in no danger of hell fire, for the element was non-existent. Presumably his soul would join that of Thomas Trelawny—their good and bad deeds had been fairly evenly balanced ; he had lived a very similar life to that of his friend, and that friend had entered hell!—a city of eternal, dazzling light !

‘There is hope for you, Anthony Grigg,’ he muttered half aloud. Aye, surely the great, omnipotent Presence would admit the soul of another agnostic ; for Thomas Trelawny had stated in the letter that he whom they called Diabolus was good and just. If not—if not—(he

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paused and shuddered) if not, heaven could never be open to him—and then—

Faugh! Impossible! All souls rejected of heaven *must surely* find a welcome in hell.

His knees shook. He trembled at the thought of the gates of hell being shut against him.

But he would read on. Doubtless his friend's soul would communicate the facts concerning his own entry into this city of eternal light.

So once again he took up this strange manuscript of so strange a texture.

'God is accounted a merciful spirit, Anthony. But the ruler of hell, the great omnipotent Presence, extends a far wider mercy than he. The majority of such souls—and they are numbered by legions—as are fortunate enough to be rejected

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of heaven are permitted to pass through the shining portals of hell. God weighs the evil of a man's life against the good, and almost invariably the evil turns the scale. In that case the soul has cause for rejoicing—unless, in the flesh, it has committed one of those tabulated sins which, unless expiation has been made before death, the great, omnipotent Presence—all merciful though he is—cannot and will not pardon. Of these sins I will write you hereafter. . . .

Anthony Grigg dropped the manuscript from his nerveless fingers. He gave a great gasp, something appeared to rattle in his throat—it was as though the breath of life was departing from him. His muscles contracted. His eyeballs rolled wildly, ungovernably, in their sockets. He was within an ace of being stricken by another terrible fit.

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Then there *was* such an event as that of a soul being *rejected of hell!*

For a few minutes—they comprised to him an eternity—he suffered the tortures of a damned soul, one that had been refused admission to hell.

The suspense, the agony of doubt accentuated by the converse beauty of hope, the longing to know the worst—the nature of these tabulated sins—was a hideous torment to his mind. Thomas Trelawny had promised to communicate the nature of these sins *hereafter*.

And the souls in hell had no knowledge of time. Might he not then be too late with his communication? Might not the soul of Anthony Grigg already reach the shining portals of hell before the warning as to the nature of these tabulated sins was indited?

Oh, it was horrible, *horrible, horrible* to contemplate! He uprose from his

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chair, casting the precious letter from him, into the far corner of the room, with the violence and unreasonable petulance of a madman.

He shrieked aloud in an agony of spiritual fear, so that the fellow-lodgers in his tottering shanty bolted their doors and lay trembling in their beds. Then he dashed his already bruised and blood-stained head against the wall in his frenzy. Assuredly the great, omnipotent Presence had sent him a torture equalled only by the knowledge of a soul that it had forfeited a right to enter hell.

The philosopher had lost all philosophy —he was for the moment a raving maniac.

When the sun dawned upon the quiet city one of Anthony Grigg's fellow-lodgers, an old woman, gaunt of limb and grimy of feature, cautiously pushed the philosopher's

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door ajar and looked within. She had heard the fearful shriek, the terrible curses, and the sounds of repeated blows in the night; but terror had chained her to her bed. However, with the light of morning came a species of courage formed mainly of a morbid curiosity. She had neither like nor dislike for the philosopher—she seldom saw him and scarcely ever spoke to him—they existed beneath the same roof, but they lived their curious lives widely apart.

She was a rag-picker and he a sage; but when she glanced timorously upon the interior of the room, she proved philosopher enough to mentally consider that searching after truth in a garret was an even more terrible mode of existence than that of searching after coins in rag-heaps.

Anthony Grigg lay in a cramped position at the foot of the bed; and at

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the first glance—seeing blood stains upon the wall and blood stains upon the old man's hands and face and clothing—she thought that a foul murder had been committed whilst the serenity of the night had been broken by those chilling cries of agony. He lay so very very still, and the room was in great disorder—everything pointed to a gruesome crime.

But, looking more minutely, she perceived that the philosopher was breathing faintly. So she stepped in and put forth her dirty, claw-like fingers and shook him with a gentleness unusual to herself.

He stirred in his sleep and eventually opened his eyes. ‘Where—where am I?’ he muttered dazedly. He had forgotten the letter, and for the moment he had no knowledge of his late frenzy of fear.

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'At 'ome,' she answered curtly.
'Who's bin a-tryin' to corpse yer?'

With an effort he raised himself upon his elbows, staring surprisedly at the rag-picker. He was stiff in every limb; and this fact brought the horror of the past night, dimly at first, but gradually more clearly, to his mind.

'I thank you. It is nothing,' he said.
'I—I—was subject to fits when a boy,
and I suppose I must have had one—a
severe one—last night.'

The searcher after truth had lied.

'Umph! D'ye want any 'elp?' queried
the rag-picker.

'No, thank you, madam. I have my
medicine chest, and am perfectly capable
of treating myself,' he made answer, as
though desiring her to be gone.

The woman, only too glad—he was
such a ghastly spectacle—took the hint
and closed the door behind her, muttering.

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‘ ‘E looks as though ‘e’d fought the devil ‘imself.’

(She little knew how near her observation was to the truth.)

Then Anthony Grigg painfully rose, and after washing his bruised and blood-stained face and hands, making and drinking a cup of cocoa and eating a crust of bread, once more sat down in fear and trembling—fascinated, irresistibly drawn, as the rabbit is drawn towards the glittering eyes of the serpent—to resume his perusal of the Letter from Hell.

CONTINUATION OF THE LETTER.

‘Anthony, it is no easy task to attempt a description of this most beauteous city in which countless souls, invisible in themselves, yet having the power of sight, float about for ever and ever and

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ever. You have read of the beauties of heaven, Anthony? Well, this everlasting city contains all these beauties and more. There is nothing in hell that is not loveliest of the lovely. Hell is composed of one succession of beautiful sights, and one succession of beautiful sounds. And the great, omnipotent Presence, whom, by reason of the dazzling nature of his glory, the souls cannot approach closely, is ever being lauded by the sweet voices of his faithful angels. There is the most exquisite music in hell.

‘Unsurpassed and unsurpassable in sweetness is the shout of gladness which uprises when another soul is suffered to enter the shining portals by command of the great and omnipotent Presence. The angels are constantly welcoming fresh souls which have succeeded in obtaining rejection of heaven.

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‘ But although happiness and light and love reign supreme, there is sorrow in hell. This arises from those sins to which I have before alluded. Souls guilty of them, unless by some supreme act of goodness they have, whilst yet mortals, made expiation on their planet, are, as I told you, rejected of hell. Then it is that sorrow enters this city of joy immeasurable, for the awful shriek that the damned soul emits is terrible indeed to hear. It rings through the everlasting city of dazzling light ; it rings through the entire universe, and the planets echo and re-echo the haunting, torturing sound. It is the cry of one destined to float through space—homeless, restless, love less, joyless—in the awful torment of the full knowledge that such punishment is its eternal doom ; and hell itself shudders at the sound. It is then that our Prince, the great and omnipotent Presence, weeps.

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It is then that his angels grieve. And souls that have already received this hideous punishment, in the depth of their eternal despair mockingly taunt that accursed soul which, like them, is sent forth, banished from rest for ever.

'In my next letter I will speak of the nature of these tabulated sins which bring so frightful a punishment, and of the diverse inhabitants of the divers planets, who enter these glittering portals.—Ever your affectionate though separated friend,

'THOMAS TRELAWNY.'

Anthony Grigg shivered involuntarily as he read on to the final words. Can anyone conceive a more horrible torture than that which this letter had administered to him? Already he suffered the torments of 'that accursed soul which . . . is sent forth, banished from

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rest for ever.' What if he should die before the second letter reached him? What if he had already committed one of those tabulated sins which are the seeds that lead to the harvest of the bolted gate of hell—for eternity. True, the soul of Thomas Trelawny had stated that 'some supreme act of goodness . . . made expiation.' But what might this supreme act of goodness be? The philosopher—with all his philosophy—could find no answer to the problem.

He did not again beat his head against the wall in a frenzy of terror. He was calm—as calm as any sage before or after him—but his was the calmness of despair.

He thought over his past and the many evil deeds he had committed. He knew that he had no hope of entering heaven—above and beyond all his sins, he had *scoffed at God*. He had laughed

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the existence of such a spirit to scorn. And God was less merciful—so said Thomas Trelawny's soul—than the great omnipotent Presence, the ruler of hell. No, he had no hope of heaven.

And hell? Aye, he had one faint ray of hope. His companion in sin, in unbelief, had, by the wondrous clemency of that great, omnipotent Presence, been permitted to enter that city of dazzling light. But it was quite possible that he, Anthony Grigg, had been guilty of one of those tabulated sins, in the days of his youth, of which Thomas Trelawny had most certainly—as to Anthony Grigg's knowledge he had never done aught savouring of supreme goodness—avoided the committal.

He might have been the veriest dullard instead of a sage, for until the second letter from hell appeared upon his desk he could only grope blindly in the dark,

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he could only await in suspense—his philosophy, wrong at the very basis, availed him nothing—and that suspense might kill him!

He shuddered. His blood chilled in his veins, his bones shook at the thought. It probably *would* kill him. The agony which he had already suffered had brought him years nearer the grave.

And he must still suffer and suffer and suffer.

How long? How long could his spirit bear this agony of doubt?

The second letter might not reach him for hours, or days, or even years—and *then*, he thought again, it might come *too late*.

The scoffer at religion—the unbeliever in eternal life—fell upon his knees by the bedside and prayed—not to God, he feared to pray to Him—but to that

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great, omnipotent Presence in hell. He knelt and prayed to the devil.

For a long time, with interlaced fingers and upturned face, he entreated that great, omnipotent Presence to permit his entry into hell.

P A R T I I

THE PITEOUS PRAYER

DAY after day an old, bent, and decaying man—around the parchment skin of whose face hung a wreath of snow-white hair crowned by a velvet skull cap, dressed in long since out-of-date garments of a rusty black hue—might have been seen tottering in senile fashion from Drury Lane to the Thames Embankment; and each day his face bore traces of bitter disappointment, which he made no effort to conceal.

He would sit all day upon one of the seats, merely rising to obtain a drink at the fountain and sustain his feeble inner man by an occasional nibble at

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the pieces of bread and butter which he kept rolled up in paper in his breast-pocket.

He seemed to take no notice whatever of what went on around him ; but, now and again, his neighbour upon the seat would discover him muttering to himself.

And in the evening, when he returned to his tumble-down shanty, his wrinkled countenance would be lighted up, his coal-black eyes would sparkle with expectation. A new life—the vigour of youth—would momentarily fill his veins as he ascended the creaking stairs and passed swiftly into the room which he called ‘home !’ He would feverishly stride to the writing-desk, which he now so little occupied, and run his hands across the papers scattered on the surface, and devour them with his hungry eyes.

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Then, failing in his quest, the sudden access of life would as suddenly leave him, and he would become the senile creature which he had been throughout the morning, and would sink into his cane-bottomed chair, with a groan of utter hopelessness.

It was Anthony Grigg who thus conducted his daily existence.

He was anxiously—nay more, with a everish longing—awaiting the arrival of that second letter promised by the soul of Thomas Trelawny, which to his own soul meant so much.

Each morning, when he rose from his ill-conditioned couch, he eagerly sought for it—but it did not come. Then, knowing, or rather imagining, that the great, omnipotent Presence would only cause it to be deposited upon his desk during either his—Anthony Grigg's—sleep or absence, he would quit

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his abode, would quit those other papers which he once had held of inestimable value in his searchings after truth, but which to him now were the merest balderdash, and would fill in his absence in the profitless way already described, hoping against hope that in the interim *one* missive which could bring truth to his mind and either terror or joy to his soul, might be delivered against his return.

And so, day after day, to the number of three hundred and sixty-four—each one bringing him nearer to the grave which he was now so rapidly approaching—he waited, apparently in vain.

On the three hundred and sixty-fifth—the 14th day of April 1892, the second anniversary of Thomas Trelawny's death—he arose, as the first streak of dawn penetrated the dilapidated shutters,

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and eagerly sought the tidings from hell.

Surely, surely, he said to himself, although the souls in hell are ignorant of the times of earth, the great, omnipotent Presence in his wondrous knowledge is conversant with them (else why did he cause the first letter to reach the garret on the date upon which his friend passed away?) and would deliver the letter upon the same day of the same month, thus, in his mercy, saving the soul of Anthony Grigg from further suspense.

His hands shook as with the palsy whilst he groped in the semi-darkness. His heart beat wildly. Ah-h-h!—then it stood still.

There was no letter upon the writing-table.

He suffered agonies, but not again did he lapse into frenzy, not again did

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he tear his hair and beat his head against the wall.

All the vitality — what little he now possessed — seemed to have departed from him. A choking sigh struggled from his throat. He felt that death was close at hand. He felt that his soul was doomed — doomed to everlasting unrest.

He dropped down and bowed his head upon the floor in supplication.

'O great and omnipotent Presence,' he murmured in piteous accents of woe, 'have mercy—have *mercy*—have *mercy*! O Presence! what have I done that I should bear this hideous torture on earth? Look upon me! Pity me! Exercise your wondrous power and release me from this agonising suspense! Extend, oh, extend your clemency to my overwrought soul.'

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His voice grew fainter, and fainter yet. The pleadings ceased.

The philosopher, in his *ignorance* of what lay in store for his immortal soul, lay swooning.

And whilst—in that singular sensation which accompanies certain kinds of unconsciousness—he felt a thumping in his brain, he appeared to hear a rushing, rustling sound, a voice of exquisite dulcetness seemed to strike upon his suddenly-charmed ear, and it was as though a sweetly-scented breath of air passed swiftly across his face and stirred momentarily his hoary locks.

And instantly he revived, recovering consciousness.

He rose to his feet—hopeful, buoyant, rejoicing in his newly-acquired strength. It was as though he had tasted of the fabulous elixir of life.

Ah ! if only this vitality would pulse

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through his veins until the second letter came, there then might yet be some hope that his soul would not leave his body without a full knowledge of the fate awaiting it.

His keen eyes lighted on the writing-table; and instantaneously a wave of joy, followed by one of absolute fear, shot through his brain.

The second letter from hell lay scrolled thereon.

It was similar in all outward respects to the former one.

Anthony Grigg lifted up his face and mentally thanked the great and omnipotent Presence for, as he imagined, thus swiftly answering his impassioned prayer.

Then in unseemly—but not unnatural—haste he grasped the manuscript and proceeded to devour the contents, as a ravenous wolf will devour the long-looked-for carcase in its path.

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LETTER THE SECOND.

‘ HELL.

‘ DEAR FRIEND ANTHONY,

‘ Again I out-pour my soul to you at the gracious command of the great, omnipotent Presence. Were I to send ten thousand letters, I could not adequately describe this city wherein there is no sin. You doubtless recollect reading Dante’s description in his “Inferno” of the babel of voices at the gate of hell. In that *one* particular he was right to a certain extent; that is, that souls who in their mortality spoke according to the tongue of their nation—upon whatever planet they existed—come, using their mortal language, to the gate of hell. But, Anthony, he was even then wide of the truth. For, there being no set day of judgment, every soul floating hither so soon as it

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has put off its mortality and has been rejected of heaven, the concourse of souls at the gate is not so great as to cause a babel. Moreover, contrary to Dante's theory, the souls, each and all, are clamouring for *admission*. Now let me draw your attention to the tongue *within* the gates of this wondrous city of light and music and love and happiness illimitable. It is a universal tongue. The soul, upon entering the portals resplendent with glittering stones and gold, at once, intuitively, without the least education, is able to speak and to understand this most melodious language which sounds like the rippling of many waters, and yet at the same time it maintains the mastery over its own tongue, or such tongues as it may have been conversant with in mortality. The fact of the soul—shapeless, invisible—having the power of speech may to you, a mortal, in your

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limited range of reasoning, seem incredible; but, Anthony, if so, it is but another phase of our once mutual parrot-cry for *proof*. We—the souls who rejoice in hell everlasting—have neither mouths, eyes, ears, nostrils, bodies nor brains; yet we have voices to chant our adulation of the great, omnipotent Presence; sight to view his light and majesty and grace; hearing to listen to his most exquisitely musical tones; the sense of smell where-with to bathe ourselves in the sweet perfumes that are wafted hither and thither by the gentlest of zephyrs; feeling, that we may experience the glorious sensation of those zephyrs enwrapping us; and the power of thought and reasoning to show us that all in hell is beautiful beyond the conception of mortal man. The sense of taste alone is denied the soul in hell, and that is because there is no need of it.

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‘Now, as to the theory of the river of hell—the Styx. It is essential, however puerile it may sound to you in your mortal phase of wisdom, to allude even to this. For the great, omnipotent Presence desires me to show conclusively that nothing is known, or has been known, amongst mortals, of hell. Well, Anthony, when you and I sought to learn the truth we gave no credence to this theory of the Styx, for it was at best but mythology. Therein we were right. There is no river Styx in hell; no hoary boatman for ever plying to and fro. But there are crystal waters whose beauty is beyond the power of mortals to realise or conceive, which reveal the most lovely and wonderful spectacles beneath their surface, and hymn a continual chant of such music as mortal ear has never heard. Then, too, there are gardens in which flowers of everlasting

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beauty, of an infinity of the most lovely shapes and colours, rear themselves. As they are, so were they created by the great, omnipotent Presence ; for, although there is life, there is no growth in hell. This is accounted for by the fact that natural life—by which I mean development—is rightly regarded by the great, omnipotent Presence as the origin of all evil. It—development—is one of the errors which he strove to check when yet in heaven ; it is one of those wrongs which by the holy battle he vigorously attempted to right, and which led to his being cast out ; for he perceived that with *life* must come *sin*. This was at the Beginning, in “the vast death-bound era of Primeval Time.” Had the universe remained in its pristine state, had there been no such force as evolution, sin could never have found a place, but with progress for the law of nature came sin.

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Therefore sin is fundamentally the struggle for existence. This is now quite obvious—a postulate—to my soul. For the stronger must necessarily crush the weaker—if the latter in any way interferes with the former's development; and such is, and ever was, the case with everything in nature, since that ever-to-be-deplored commencement of evolution. Therefore, conversely, development is sin (brought about at the instances of God—and futilely attempted to be checked by his hierarch, the “son of the morning,” now known to the souls in hell as the great, omnipotent Presence) whether in the original case of the mollusc and trilobite age, or (in the order of evolution) that of the gigantic low vegetation and the fish, or that of the reptile, the mammal, the mastodon, the mammoth, or that of humanity itself. For who—amongst humanity—in your own time upon the

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earth, whilst the curse of civilisation is spreading from pole to pole, goes to the wall but the weaker, whether the extremity of his weakness lies in his mental or in his physical self?

' Does this not clearly show to you, Anthony, who are strong—strong as any mortal—in intellect, the greatness, the goodness, the unparalleled justice of the great, omnipotent Presence, who thus strove *and succeeded* in forming a future place for those souls who, when but the puppets of nature, broke the laws of God in following the laws of evolution—that terrible and accursed system which he, the Deity himself, against the advice of his Prince, inaugurated. The Deity sent the spark of vitality into the death-bound universe, and then he made laws to govern the doings of all—conceived in the womb of darkness and born into the gradually-increasing light of life—laws

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that were at once contrary to his fundamental law, that of nature's life. It was but a freak of the Deity to thus bring man by many stages into existence, and give everlasting life to the few who sinned but slightly in that existence the very element of which is sin, but it was a work of liberty, justice, aye, and mercy, upon the part of the founder of hell, to form a place and make easy the entry thereto for every mortal's soul that had dwelt in the universe, upon whatsoever planet, or in whatsoever form it had previously had its being.

'I anticipate the question that will here inevitably form upon your tongue, Anthony. Were there then souls in the universe, in the mollusc and trilobite age?—were there souls in the rocks?—souls in the lowest forms of vegetation?—souls in the fishes?—souls in the reptiles?—souls in mammals?—souls in every living thing

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after the first spark of life had been applied to that which constituted the universe and which might otherwise, but for that wanton spark, have slept an eternal sleep? Yes, Anthony, *in all that had life, and generated life, there was a soul.* But undeveloped as the life was, so was the soul. And an undeveloped soul is no more living than the child unborn, who leaps in the womb and yet may never breathe the air. To put it more clearly—although I have no fear that *you* will fail to understand my meaning — in every separate existence which went, by slow but sure stages, to form the universe, there was the *germ* of a soul. Well, these germs did not all prove fruitful, although the original germ, the first spark of life in the stillness of the primeval era, developed equally with the development of nature, until at last—in the fulness of time—on each mighty

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planet in the universe, this progress brought forth the mightiest—although that in itself is but little better than a mere puppet—living being. In the case of your planet, the earth—man. In the case of other planets — just whatsoever form of creature which evolution with her strange and accidental quips and cranks brought to the highest standard of excellence, mentally and physically. Thus you will see that until this creature was brought to perfection the soul remained in an imperfect state—but upon the one attaining completeness the other also attained it. The full formation of the creature was simultaneous with that of the soul.

'Again I anticipate your further question. Have these other souls—these not fully-formed souls, in bodies or shapes or matter—immortality? Do they pass away into eternity, there to

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dwell—in heaven, or hell, or space, according to the judgment passed upon them—for everlasting? Nay, Anthony, because the bodies, shapes, or matter, which contained these souls in mortality, merely assisted, during their own development, in evolving the chief living being whose soul is immortal. These were mere pawns in the game of evolution. They merely made stepping-stones to the apex of the cliff of perfection in that form of mortality which must contain the soul immortal. As in the case of a prematurely-born child, they come forth from their mortal tenement only to die, if it so happens that they breathed at all; but the majority are still-born. There is no immortality for such half-formed souls as these.

‘Once more I anticipate your query. What are the forms of those creatures—dwelling in other planets, in other solar

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systems—which, having by evolution attained physical perfection, have as the natural sequence attained perfection of the soul? They vary, Anthony, as I before stated, according to the infinite vagaries of development. No two planets contain similar beings. In one, perhaps, this perfection has been attained by beings bearing a faint resemblance to some of the mammals known to man. In another—by a creature in the form of the feathered tribe. In another—by a creature after the manner of a fish. In each of the many worlds their physical forms differ, but the soul is the same in whatsoever world it found life, and it *must* ultimately, when the body ceases to breathe, find access to heaven or hell, or be relegated to *eternal unrest* in space.

'What a terrible and monstrous act is this then, Anthony! What an abuse of power! The Supreme Being—supreme

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over all *immortals*—put the first vital spark into the universe, *well knowing* that that spark must eventually, by its own unavoidable growth, burst into a flame of sin.—As the life evolved, so sin evolved; as by the evolution of life came bodily and spiritual perfection, so came *perfection in sin*—and then the harvest of doomed souls.

‘Had this wanton act been committed in ignorance as to the ultimate result, it would still have been a hideous folly; but it was done *with a full knowledge* of the horrible evil which the march of life and time would produce.

‘But let us look upon the other side of this picture. Can mortal mind conceive aught more beautiful, or aught more divinely courageous than the act of him whom they designate Diabolus uprising with his loyal angels to stay the hand that would do this thing, staking his

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high position in heaven upon the die which he cast for the sake of those souls which he knew must inevitably be evolved by life in the universe? Such nobility is almost beyond the limited comprehension of man. He staked his all—save his immortality, and that it was impossible for him to sacrifice—to prevent that breath of life entering the universe; staked it to save mortal sorrow and pain and sin, and to save souls yet unborn, yet unconceived even, from the fearful fate of unrest everlasting; staked it—and *lost!*

‘So the soul, through the fateful breath of life, was conceived.

‘But even then, beaten, degraded, thrust out of heaven, his wonderful pity and compassion caused him to prepare a place for those souls which should sin—not wantonly—but in the sure forthcoming struggle for existence.

‘Assuredly, Anthony, the great, omni-

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potent Presence has more than earned the devout and grateful worship of a myriad souls in hell throughout eternity. . . .'

THE PHILOSOPHER'S ARGUMENT.

Anthony Grigg had become so deeply interested in this terrible indictment against the wisdom of the creator, that during its perusal he had well-nigh forgotten the object with which his whole soul had anxiously—in a fever of suspense—awaited the arrival of this second letter from Thomas Trelawny.

His own conscience—or should I say his own *terror of the unknown future*, hell or eternal unrest, which awaited him?—slumbered and slept.

With his elbows resting upon the writing-table, his chin propped upon the palms of his hands, and his long, white

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beard trailing down to his knees, he sat lost in thought.

After all, his philosophy had not been so widely at fault, he told himself. He had long been a disciple of evolution theorists, and he had refused to believe in the Deity put forward by man, as the creator, until he had *proof* of his existence. Now—whilst yet he drew breath upon the earth—the proof had been given him. He had refused to believe in a future state until he had proof that there was one. And again, in this case, the proof had been given him.

Not for one instant did the vaguest shadow of a doubt as to the truth of the existence of God, or the creation of the world by God, or the future of the soul, put forward by Thomas Trelawny, enter his mind. He had always held himself ready to believe when his eyes

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could see and his reason could find no rebutting evidence. And now his eyes did see, and his reason, a year ago, sought vainly for a position upon which to take up his stand and argue fairly and squarely against the truth of the statements contained in the first letter from hell. (The fact of the letter coming from his friend's soul was evidence of its truth.) So he never thought of questioning those in the second.

He had, for the time being, sunk the weak mortal; and with the weak mortal the terror-stricken soul went under. He was a man of mind and brain—a man capable of, and making use of, deep and powerful concentrated thought. He was once again the philosopher of old.

Dispassionately he weighed every argument for and against the action of the creator, and with equal fairness he considered the pros and cons of the

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case of the great and omnipotent Presence.

He sat very still, thus philosophically judging God and the devil—and, now that he *knew* them to exist, he saw nothing presumptuous in his so doing.

After some hours of such consideration he mentally gave his verdict. He found the creator guilty of creating sin when he caused the universe to conceive souls, and of meting out eternal punishment for the souls' sins which he himself had created. That is to say, the creator had, by the laws of evolution, over which he, himself, had no control — once having sown the seeds of life—made puppets, which were capable of feeling pain, which he knew must experience that pain, not only in the flesh, but in the spirit, and, in the great majority of instances, throughout eternity. In this he was at one with his late brother philosopher.

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He condemned the action of the creator as cruel beyond expression.

In the case of the devil, whom he thought of only as the great, omnipotent Presence, he failed to agree entirely with Thomas Trelawny. If the great, omnipotent Presence had certain powers—the truth of which Anthony Grigg had no further means of knowing—then he held that he had erred.

He argued thus:

‘It is now evident to me that the Deity has powers almost limitless. The only limits which Thomas Trelawny’s soul has brought forward are, firstly, that, once having given to the death-bound universe the spark of life, evolution must go on until the perfect being is formed, and with it the complete soul, the creator of life being powerless to check this progress; secondly, that although he could and did cast the devil out of heaven, he was un-

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able to break his immortality, unable *apparently* to check him in the formation of another eternal city in which he, Diabolus, might reign—otherwise, his policy having been entirely adverse to that of Diabolus, he would have undoubtedly exercised his might in that direction—and therefore he must have been unable to break the power of Diabolus, *outside* heaven, which power was second only to his own; thirdly, that he was, and is, unable to forbid the entry of souls, which have been rejected of heaven, into hell—or else, doubtless, discountenancing the policy of his (once) right-hand spirit, as he evidently wished to do, he would have done so prior to the entry of so much as *one* soul.

‘Therefore, it is obvious that the powers of the devil, the great, omnipotent Presence, now that he has quitted heaven, are almost, if not quite, on an equality

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with those of God. And as the methods of the one were immediately adverse to the methods of the other; as, also, the devil was not afraid—where his powers were more limited—to wage war against God in heaven; reason tells me that it was weak—although, as the soul of Thomas Trelawny justly says, it showed his “wonderful pity and compassion” of the great, omnipotent Presence to *merely* prepare another eternal city for the souls brought into life through the evolution of the first spark of vitality in the universe. Surely he should have continued to wage war against this cruel policy of creation. Surely he could and should have destroyed the life which God had given. Surely he should have sent Death into the universe and slain the soul ere it reached that perfect state which rendered it immortal. Surely he should have played the stronger part, frustrated this terrible evolution,

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and saved the unborn soul its awakening.

The professor having delivered this mental verdict, wise man that he was, immediately proceeded to seek for any flaws that might possibly exist in his own argument. His philosophy told him that to reason without having a solid substratum of facts is certainly folly, and is, of all things, the most likely to lead one to the formation of erroneous opinions; and yet it also told him that the philosophy of fact is unattainable except through the philosophy of thought. But then in this instance he had a solid substratum of facts from which to build up his reasoning, in the shape of an authenticated letter from a soul that had left this mortal sphere. Therefore, if his reasoning was sound, he was wiser than the great, omnipotent Presence, and the latter had been guilty of an act of folly,

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or at anyrate weakness, in mitigating the harm that the creation had wrought, instead of counteracting it.

Then the heinous nature of his own act—his criticism of the great and omnipotent Presence's immortal policy—came home to him. He had *dared* to judge the ruler of hell!

Swiftly he reviewed the arguments which led up to his judgment.

‘O fool!’ he muttered. ‘Did not the soul of Thomas Trelawny state that the creator, himself, was powerless to *check* the slow but sure tide of evolution? How then could one no stronger than he *destroy* it?’

He clasped his hands, and, uplifting his eyes, implored forgiveness of the devil.

And whilst in this attitude—the late strain of thought had proved so severe to his already life-tired brain—he fell into a doze.

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'Sluggard, art thou still asleep? Art thou resolved to sleep the sleep of death? Will neither tidings from heaven nor hell awake thee? Wilt thou say still, Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, and a little folding of the hands to sleep? Oh, that I was skilful in lamentation, and had but a yearning heart towards thee! How would I pity thee! How would I bemoan thee! Poor soul, lost soul, dying soul! What a hard heart have I that I cannot mourn for thee! If thou shouldst lose but a limb, or a child, or a friend, it would not be much; but, poor man, it is Thy Soul!'

The voice, the words, the solemn warning had awakened Anthony Grigg.

Was it — he asked himself, as he sprang up, trembling in every limb, the perspiration oozing at every pore — the voice of Thomas Trelawny? Had his dead friend's soul spoken?

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He bent forward, straining every nerve to hear the voice again.

If he had slumbered he was fully awake now.

What could be the meaning of this speech so fraught with warning? What, but that he, Anthony Grigg, had but a short time to live and he yet had not ascertained, by means of the knowledge of those tabulated sins which debarred the soul's entry into hell, whether he was to be numbered amongst the worshippers of the great, omnipotent Presence, or to be doomed to everlasting unrest.

'Will neither tidings from heaven nor hell awake thee?' Aye, of a surety, these tidings from hell would cause him to awaken and search for the fate that awaited his immortal soul.

But whence came the voice that had bidden him awake?

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He crossed his wretched apartment with eager, tottering footsteps, and gaining the landing, peered through the door-crack into the adjoining room. It was the home of the rag-picker.

A young clergyman, with an earnest countenance, sat upon a broken chair, reading Bunyan to the woman. It was his voice that the philosopher had heard. He was now reading to the woman of hell: ‘If it was to be in hell but for a day, but for a year, nay, for ten thousand years, it would, in comparison, be nothing. But it is for ever! Oh, this cutting Ever!’

The professor turned away, smothering an ironical laugh. This cutting Ever! Ay, cutting! but only when the soul *fails* to spend it in hell!

Nevertheless he was glad to have been awakened, glad also to find that the solemn warning in reality bore no

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meaning to him—although he intended to profit by it. Yet it was a strange mixture of fear and gladness. He dreaded, although he longed, to learn the nature of those tabulated sins—and ere he sat himself down to further peruse his letter from hell, he found the old terror fast taking possession of him.

But with an effort that seemed to strain every nerve in his brain he raised the parchment-like manuscript and read on.

CONTINUATION OF THE SECOND LETTER.

‘I would now, Anthony, draw your attention to the tabulated sins—which are written in blood-red letters upon the crystal keystone of the arch above the outer entrance gate of hell—the committal of which, unless expiation has been

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wrought by the guilty one on earth, or his own planet, entails the terrible sentence, "Depart, O cursed soul! and go forth into limitless space, there to float without hope of escape, emancipation, or reprieve, from everlasting to everlasting."

'These are the words which, in the character of the tongue of hell, are read by every soul which floats upwards to the shining gates of the eternal city.

'The slanderer, the hypocrite (this means one who has led a life of hypocrisy and not one who has acted the hypocrite upon occasions), the blackmailer, the extortioner, the wrecker of a human life, and the whoremonger, unless in mortality they have repented and have done that which is good in the sight of the great, omnipotent Presence, are for ever debarred an entry through these portals. . . .'

THE PHILOSOPHER'S CURSE.

A gleeful chuckle escaped the lips of Anthony Grigg. *He* had slandered no one. *He* had been guilty of no hypocrisy ; rather had he been too honest in expressing his own opinions, too outspoken in his views concerning theological subjects. *He* had never attempted to blackmail a fellow-creature ; he had too little fondness for money to attempt to obtain it by villainous threats. *He*, also, for the same reason, had not played the contemptible part of the extortioner. *He* had not wrecked a human— Stay. What did the term mean ?—‘The wrecker of a human life ?’ Had it been the wrecker of a human *soul* he could have understood it ; he could then have answered for himself. For to wreck a human soul one must surely lead it, or force it,

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or induce it, by some means, to commit one of those tabulated sins. But to wreck a human life was, perhaps, very different. Why, oh why could not the great, omnipotent Presence have been more explicit in this one case? Why could not the soul of Thomas Trelawny have given some explanation as to the true meaning of the term, as he had already done in the case of the hypocrite, which did not personally concern him? Surely it must mean the wrecker of a human soul, for the wrecking of a human life might be brought about by that struggle for existence which the great, omnipotent Presence admitted was a sin thrust upon every living thing by the Deity who had created the first vital spark.

He took up the question and minutely examined it from every point of view, but it was in vain that he sought to

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determine what constituted the intentional wrecking of a human life.

His deep insight into human nature, his methodical powers of reasoning, his profound philosophy, availed him nought.

When and how is a human life wrecked? he asked himself. Does the taking of that life form the wreckage? or does only the spoiling? And if the latter, what degree of spoliation?

He pressed his hands against his throbbing temples. He feared — ah! with what an awful dread!—that his reason trembled in the balance. His brain seemed to be afire.

After all—even now that he knew the nature of the tabulated sins, now that the information, for which he had thirsted hour by hour for the past twelve months, had come to him—the only one out of the half-dozen sins that might in any way affect his eternal

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peace was beyond his comprehension. He could not, strive as he might, understand its meaning. So, after all, he was left in doubt as to the future of his own soul.

He snarled at the great, omnipotent Presence for thus sending him a torture by hope, and he rose to his feet in a frenzy of passion and cursed the Deity who had wrought all this evil by putting the first spark of life into the death-bound universe.

His eyes were bloodshot, his tongue was aflame with oaths, as he stretched forth his skinny, trembling right hand towards the heavens and let loose the blasphemous torrent of abuse. He defied the Almighty and jeered at Satan, shaking his bony fist at the skies. He looked like the earthly embodiment of a demon from the Inferno. Had there been a blazing fire round about

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him, the man who peered with terrified eyes through the doorway might have imagined he saw Satan himself. As it was, the young clergyman, for it was he, little thought a *philosopher* stood before him cursing the Almighty. He thought he saw a raving lunatic, and consequently fled in terror.

And a little later, his fury spent, the weakening reaction took hold upon Anthony Grigg. He sank upon the floor, sobbing like a woman, cringing despairingly for mercy at Satan's hands.

And, yet a little later, the mental capacity of the philosopher asserted its supremacy over the imaginative terror of the soul. Anthony Grigg saw plainly how miserably futile it was for him to rail against that which was—the life of the universe—or that which might or might not be—his soul's rejection of hell.

So once again he took up that india-

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rubber-like manuscript with the white lettering in the calligraphy of his deceased comrade in agnosticism. But he felt intuitively that he must hasten; for the effect of reading these Letters from Hell was to leave him weaker and weaker in body, and to make his mind totter, and his head swim, as a man will totter and become dizzy when gazing over the edge of a yawning precipice at the jutting rocks and the whirling rapids beneath.

CONTINUATION OF THE SECOND LETTER.

‘Thus, Anthony, you will perceive that the clergy and the infidels, the followers or the teachers of each and every religion, indeed all humanity, from whatsoever planet, are welcomed to hell, provided these tabulated sins have either not been com-

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mitted or have been expiated whilst the soul was yet in the flesh.

‘ This, again, is only another instance of the boundless mercy of the great, omnipotent Presence. He does not expect a soul to have believed in heaven or hell or life everlasting. He does not expect a soul to have believed in his wondrous goodness and clemency; for to believe blindly is folly. He only expects the soul in the flesh to act according to its limited knowledge of good and evil, in spite of the fundamental sin of which it is theoretically guiltless—that of evolution.

‘ Now, Anthony, I must conclude, for the great, omnipotent Presence has sent forth his command by the voice of one of the holy angels. So in the firm hope that ere long—according to the times of earth—your soul will float unto the golden portals of this everlasting city of dazzling light, and by the unspeakable mercy of the

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great, omnipotent Presence will be permitted to pass through, eternally to enjoy the beauties, the sweet sounds, the happiness and the peace which reign within, eternally to feast your soul's eyes upon the glorious and majestic vision of the Presence who rules us, and to bathe your soul's ears in the rich cadences of the indescribably melodious voice, such as mortal ears have never heard, which—save when a soul is rejected of hell—ring throughout the beauteous city for ever and ever and ever, I, for the last time, sign myself, Your separated friend,

‘THOMAS TRELAWNY.’

HOPE AND FEAR.

The sage sat very still for a long time pondering over this the last letter which he was to receive from hell. It seemed to him that all hope as to ascertaining the

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fate in store for his own soul had been wrenched from his grasp just as he was about to clutch it. Not once had he felt sure of obtaining the letter before death claimed him ; indeed, he had scarcely dared to hope that it might come in time. And now, when the letter actually had arrived, when he had actually reached that passage which dealt with the tabulated sins, and hope had loomed in the distance, it—the hope—had died away again, never, it seemed, to return. For the exact nature of one of those tabulated sins—the only one which he feared he might have committed—had not been revealed to him.

He looked out of the grubby window. The sun was sinking in the west ; the sky was brilliant for an April day. A few grimy, little, Drury Lane sparrows were twittering in the eaves overhead. The still grimier children were playing in the gutters ; and the news-boys were

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running down the street, shouting, ‘All the winners! ’

All the winners! Bah! They—and their numerous clients—were more concerned over a paltry horse-race than they were over their chances of admission to hell. What recked they if their souls found no resting-place throughout eternity? Nothing!—the acme of their happiness was to ‘land a ten-to-one chance.’

All the winners! Oh, the irony of it all! Here was he with a letter direct from hell itself spread out before him, a letter which told of the wondrous mercy of Satan, and yet he knew not whether he had won admission. All the winners! Perhaps some so-called ‘lucky’ wights had backed one or two of them, thereby adding to a scant store of money. The professor did not admit the possibility of luck. In his opinion luck was an

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illusion, 'a mere blind that we use to cover our ignorance of the operation of a chain of events from cause to effect.' Thus he argued that there was a logical reason—too subtle and intricate in its composition for the brain of man to accurately trace—for certain persons backing winners and for others staking their money upon losses; and also, in his own case, for his being the consignee of correspondence from the spiritual world, which enlightened his soul up to a certain point and then left it hopelessly groping in the dark. There was a logical reason for all these things, he felt sure. But what the reason in either case might be it was impossible for him to discover. That one apparently trifling error of omission in the letter spread upon the writing-table might be due to accident, an act of carelessness. *Could* spirits having the full knowledge

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of heaven, or hell, or eternity, be capable of carelessness? He did not, could not, know. On the other hand, the apparently trifling errors might have been due to design upon the part of the great, omnipotent Presence, at the spiritual hands of Thomas Trelawny. *Could* Satan—the Satan whom his friend's soul had described in such glowing terms—be guilty of so torturing an act of deception? Again he did not, could not, know.

All the winners! One man's loss is another man's gain. But supposing he had lost the right of entrance to hell, who would be the gainer?

Pshaw! Of what avail was this attempt at reasoning? It only left him deeper and deeper in the mire of doubt. Reluctantly—with the horrible dread of the future growing, growing, growing, ever growing—he acknowledged that

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until his harrowed soul left his body he would not know the fate awaiting it.

But yet might he not hope? Hope! Ah, bitter, bitter mockery! The hope that had not entirely died seemed but a mirage, a phantom shape springing up to disappear again, a will-o'-the-wisp to be followed, to be lost, to be seen, to evade him, to lead him on—only to torture him afresh.

'Death and knowledge were preferable to this,' he cried, in the acuteness of his mental pain.

Death and knowledge! when that knowledge might be found in eternal unrest! Oh, no! no! no! A thousand times no! He would not, could not, *dared* not die. If only he could kill his own immortal soul—ay, if; but who can slay that which is immortal?

Folly! Folly! Oh, what dire folly was this! He clutched at any and

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every straw, only to find that it availed him nothing.

He felt that he was almost bereft of that reason which once had been so subtle, so analytic, so cautious, and so true. His past power of philosophy appeared to accentuate his present impotence. He put his hand upon his throbbing temples. They burned like coals of fire.

Fate—hitherto a term to him synonymous with luck—had him in its grasp. He admitted now its existence and its horrible power—horrible because of its uncertainty. It was useless to struggle or rail against it. It was useless to attempt to lift the veil of the future. He knew all he would ever know in the flesh—and that was more, infinitely more, than any other human being had ever had vouchsafed unto him—had he *not* known, his end might have been peace. As it was, he stood there, knowingly a puppet in the

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hands of fate, unable to foretell the future —a philosopher, but not a prophet.

Suddenly that faint spark of hope, so long flickering, burst into flame, dispelling the *Æ*gean blackness and shining before his mental vision like a radiant star. A new light shone in his despairing, blood-shot eyes. His blood, but lately so chill with fear, coursed once more in warm pulsation through his veins.

Had not the great, omnipotent Presence —when he had besought him to furnish him with the second letter—answered his fervent prayer?

Hope awakened, revivified, quickened anew. He would again beseech for mercy, he would again pray to the great, omnipotent Presence to deliver his soul from this torment by elucidating the exact meaning of those words—‘The wrecker of a human life.’

So, shaking in every limb, he prostrated

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himself and prayed, as surely human creature had never prayed before, to the great, omnipotent Presence, to him who is regarded by many as the Master Sinner.

PART III

THE TWO DIARIES

THE piteous prayer ended, Anthony Grigg, soothed and comforted by the hope that an answer—either direct or indirect—would be forthcoming from the great, omnipotent Presence, arose and took a deep draught of the contents of the water-bottle upon his washstand.

Even as he stood with the bottle raised to his grey lips, a voice which sounded as the striking of a thousand harmonious chords upon some stringed instrument, broke dulcetly upon his charmed ear.

‘Take,’ it said, ‘both the diary of your departed friend and your own. Compare

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them, and you shall know of two cases of wrecked human lives.'

And immediately the voice ceased the poverty-stricken room was filled with a mournful melody such as Anthony Grigg had never heard before. It might have been the weeping of angels. And a moment later the room became suffused with a golden light so dazzling that the philosopher could not gaze upon it, but involuntarily buried his hoary head in the bed's counterpane.

Then followed a soft, rushing sound, as of wings beating the air which had become warm and delicately perfumed; and as this died away into silence, so passed away the sweet-sounding dirge and the brilliance which had followed it; and the room was dark and cold and silent as the tomb.

When at last he dared to raise his head, the very hairs of which had been

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stirred by the fragrant air, he found that the sun had set and he was all alone.

The psychological hour had overtaken the once agnostic. He rose, with a bewildered and alarmed look shining in his eyes. He passed his hand dazedly across his forehead again and again. Then he seemed to see it all plainly. He had no longer any doubt whatever. He had twice prayed to the great, omnipotent Presence, and twice had that spirit answered his prayer.

He struck a match, lighted his paraffin lamp, and tremblingly made his way to the bookcase in the far corner of the room, murmuring as he went, ‘O great, omnipotent Presence, I know not how to thank thee. I know not—I know not how.’

With quivering fingers he drew forth the diary of his dead friend. He would read through this one first. He sat down

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and read far on into the night. Turning the 141st page his eyes dilated, he gave vent to a shout of exultation and clapped his bony and skin-withered hands.

The diary was an ordinary one, composed of white sheets of paper, but the page which so markedly arrested his attention had undergone a notable change. The white paper had transformed into a similar substance to that upon which the letters from hell had been written, and the characters, from blue-black ink, had turned into that white fluid which was also characteristic of the letters from his dead friend.

This, then, was one at least of the entries to which the great, omnipotent Presence desired—in answer to his prayer—to draw his attention.

He scanned it more closely, and perceived that diagonally across the entry,

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had been written in another hand—‘The Wreck of a Human Life.’

The entry bore the date ‘August 19th, 1852.’ The following is an exact copy of the words contained:—

‘Met Jack Hylton at Colonel Garret’s garden-party. Have not seen him since we were together at Trinity. He tells me that he has been in Constantinople for the past nine years. Is now, recently, married. Introduced to his wife—charming woman, pretty, good talker, altogether most fascinating. Shall call upon Jack. His place is at Kegglewick—a seven miles’ ride from here.’

Here the indiarubber-like substance and the white lettering ended. The remaining entries on the page were in ordinary ink upon the white paper of which the book was composed.

The philosopher foresaw that this must be but the preliminary chapter in the

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story of The Wreck of a Human Life. The indiarubber-like substance was evidently the key to the position of the remaining chapters, so he turned page after page, until it once more arrested his curious eye.

Again the entry was brief and concise—like the bare plot of a tragedy.

'Rode to Kegglewick. Luncheon. Mrs H. has a fund of sparkling repartee which she never fails to draw upon. Jack evidently deeply in love—the fool! He says that he has worshipped the lady for the past six years. Mrs H. was staying in Constantinople. Invited to dinner for next Saturday. Cuisine above the English average. Shall go.'

Here, as before, the story broke off, and the white paper still remained in the same condition as when his friend had written upon it.

The philosopher thereupon swiftly turned

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the sheets until the strange mark again appeared.

‘The Kegglewick dinner a social success—if such functions may be considered successes at all. Personally I abhor them, as I do all conventionalities. Mrs H. charming as ever. Unable—through her duties as hostess—to bandy many words with her. Suppose I am piqued. Shall call in accordance with a barbarous custom.’

The page contained no more ‘marked’ entries.

But upon the next Anthony Grigg found the substance which he sought.

‘Rode over to Kegglewick. Horse cast a shoe. Necessitated sending the animal to the local farrier’s under charge of Jack’s man. This caused a lengthened visit. Jack out. Did not rave at this intelligence. Mrs H. entertained me. Spent a thoroughly pleasant afternoon.

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Am not in love with Mrs H. Have forgotten the sensation. However, am determined to make *her* fall in love with *me*. I will use my hypnotic power. I will make her weak will gravitate to mine, the stronger.'

Once more the substance remained white paper.

A few pages further the mark of the great, omnipotent Presence reappeared, and Anthony Grigg noted that in this entry Thomas Trelawny no longer alluded to his college friend as 'Jack.'

'Hylton called away from home on urgent business. Came to me, asking me to look after Mrs H. during his absence, which might possibly be a matter of months. Promised to do my best—should I have said "worst"? He wrung my hand, thanking me, with tears in his eyes.'

The page here abruptly changed from

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black to white. The next was again black with white lettering.

'What is a marriage service? A mere formula, a ceremony, a custom, evolved from an advanced state of civilisation. It is merely transitory. We shall get beyond it ere many centuries have been added to the age of the world. It is—even now—not binding in my eyes. Went to Kegglewick in compliance with my promise. Exercised hypnotic power. Have complete control over Eglantine. (Pretty name "Eglantine"; I so address her now.) If she does not love me—a hard thing to tell—at least her will is mine whilst I am in her presence.'

The next few entries which embodied the black ground and the white characters, the trade mark of Satan, were exactly similar, very brief, but bearing a meaning of great import. Day after day these entries ran:—

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‘Kegglewick.’

‘Kegglewick.’

‘Kegglewick.’

Deeply interested, Anthony Grigg followed the lengthy course of these one word statements which implied so much, until he came to another black-grounded entry of greater magnitude.

‘Hypnotic influence daily increasing. Oh, this ominous “daily”! Eglantine has confessed that she loves me. Without hesitation, without a pang of regret, without a twinge of conscience, I have betrayed the trust of my friend. Callous the majority of men would probably dub me. Callous, aye, and villainous. But I have only acted according to the instincts of nature, which these men hold, or pretend to hold, in check, because of their self-imposed laws which govern their civilised mode of existence. My philosophy does not embrace all the

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articles in the creed of the conventionality of the day. I may be wrong in that philosophy—for no man's judgment is infallible—but I am content, for the present, to abide by it and to act upon it.'

Anthony Grigg shivered. He could not regard this to him previously unknown chapter in his deceased friend's life otherwise than with compunction. He felt that Thomas Trelawny in this case had acted the part of a cold-blooded villain. There was not one extenuating circumstance. The man had avowed that he did not love his friend's wife, and yet he had deliberately—of aforethought—set about accomplishing her ruin, by means of his hypnotic powers, and had taken advantage of his friend's trust to betray it.

He foresaw that the *finale* would be discovery and sorrow, and contumely for

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one, perhaps for both, of the participators in guilt, and that perhaps even a tragedy lay at the end of the sordid story, for had not the great, omnipotent Presence marked it as ‘The Wreck of a Human Life’?

Again he fixed his attention upon the marked records in the diary.

They ran with regularity :—

‘Keggiewick.’

‘Keggiewick.’

‘Keggiewick.’

That one word was all-sufficient. It spoke volumes. Its meaning was, alas! only too obvious.

The philosopher, for the nonce, forgot the many sins that he himself had committed, and sat in judgment upon the friend of his manhood’s days. He, too, had nothing save profound contempt for the laws relating to the sexes in these days, yet he had a greater contempt for

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the past conduct of Thomas Trelawny. His standard of right and wrong—his view of morality—his ideas of honour—indeed, his whole nature, together with his mind, seemed to have undergone a complete transformation. He might have been the most rigidly conscientious and honourable of men, judging by the attitude which he mentally assumed in the face of his dead friend's admissions. He sternly judged—forgetting that ere long *he* might be standing in the dock.

The next marked entry foreshadowed the end.

'Eglantine has received a letter from Hylton. He returns next week. So long as I am with her I retain my influence; but when I am absent her whole soul revolts against her conduct—her "wicked faithlessness and deception" she terms it—and she experiences a weak and suicidal desire to write to her

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husband confessing all. This is an unforeseen dilemma. I anticipate that in his presence she will give way to this desire. How can I prevent it? I am at a loss for a means.'

The philosopher turned over the page and picked up the thread again.

'Kegglewick. She has promised never to divulge her guilty secret! Pish! Terror-stricken fool! But even now I am doubtful as to the issue. Women are so weak. I wish that I might keep my eye upon her continually, then my mind would be at ease. He comes home to-morrow. I shall take steps to meet him upon his arrival at the station.'

Here the mark ceased only to recommence a few lines further down.

'Met Hylton at the station. He was delighted to see me. Asked numerous questions concerning Eglantine's welfare, all of which I answered to his entire

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satisfaction. His thanks were unbounded. Was present at the home meeting. Eglantine obeyed my will. Do not desire to ride over to-morrow; but *must*, as my power, by absence, will assuredly weaken.'

Then came an entry showing that Thomas Trelawny was already nauseated by the potion which he had decocted for himself.

'Kegglewick again. The affair is becoming troublesome, wearisome. H. has already noted a change in his wife's demeanour towards him. I can read him like a book. As yet no suspicion has entered his mind. He is as friendly with me as in the old 'Varsity days. But he is profoundly miserable. He is always with her—scarcely suffering her to leave his sight for a moment. The monotony of visiting Kegglewick daily is distinctly galling under these circumstances; yet

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my hands are tied. I must go—to keep Eglantine's tongue under control. If I once lose my influence she will blurt out the whole story—of that I am convinced. She is growing visibly paler and thinner. Her conversation no longer sparkles with epigrams. She is listless, appearing to suffer from *ennui*, shall I say? or melancholia? The latter, I think. And her eyes are dull and dazed looking, like the eyes of one who walks in sleep. How will it all end? I wonder vainly. I cannot prognosticate the future.'

The forerunner of the crash was recorded upon the next page.

'Started for Kegglewick as usual. My horse shied at a steam-plough, took the fence (high oak posts and rails), failed to clear it, came down on his head, and sent me a "purler," as sporting men term it; I sprained my ankle, and the animal had to be destroyed. This

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occurred five miles from Kegglewick. Had it happened nearer there than home, all might yet go well. As it is, I am now lying upon my own sofa. I mistrust the future. My ascendancy over Eglantine's will must necessarily weaken. Would that I might know by telepathy what is happening—throughout my confinement—at Kegglewick. She is—or should be—*en rapport* with me. There *may*, therefore, be room for hope. But I fear for the future. I fear that my will power is not strong enough to govern hers at a distance.'

At a later hour he had written :—

'Have considered the case with due deliberation. "Mahomet and the mountain" is the precedent which I must follow. I will write to the Hyltons asking them to come and see *me*.'

The following day he had made the entry :—

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‘Sent a messenger to Kegglewick. The Hyltons came in answer. H. told me that he strongly advised Eglantine not to attempt the journey in her weak state, but she insisted upon accompanying him. This is good news. My will yet prevails. . . . They promised to drive over again to-morrow. The fall of the sword of Damocles may yet be averted.’

And the next day showed how vain were the hopes of the man who had so deeply wronged the friend who trusted him.

‘H. arrived alone, and stayed but a quarter of an hour. Eglantine was unable to rise from her bed this morning. The doctor was sent for. He says that she is *dying!* He is like a man bereft of reason. What will his state of mind be if he learns the truth from her lips? Verily I am upon the horns of a dilemma.’

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Then the cynical egotism of the man showed itself in all its ghastliness:—

‘If she should die before my influence over her mind shall wane? If her last breath should go before her confession leaves her lips? That is my *one* hope.’

Shuddering at the brutal hope of his dead friend, Anthony Grigg hastily turned the page, seeking yet another space of black grounding with letters of white. It read:—

‘Received a telegram from Kegglewick.
“*No hope. A question of hours.*” Had I belief in a Supreme Being I should send up a prayer of thankfulness. I wait a second and *last* telegram in a fever of anxiety. Ankle still much swollen and very painful.’

Again Anthony Grigg shuddered. Thomas Trelawny had more thought for his own trivial sufferings than for those of his victim, who, probably, at the

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moment of his making the entry in his diary, lay in the agonies of death, her once ruddy red lips black and drawn, her once damask cheeks ashen, her once brilliant eyes sunken and lustreless. Ah! What a heart of stone must have lodged in the breast of the philosopher, whom, after this incident in his career, he had called ‘friend.’

He lifted his fingers hastily from the pages of the diary as though the bacilli of some foul disease lay upon them.

But his horror was only momentary. Curiosity forced him to take up the book again. He must on, on, on, to the end of this cruel drama of actual life.

The next marked passage ran:—

‘No telegram. No news of any kind. It is too late for me to wire. I have almost a mind to send a mounted messenger. . . . On second thoughts

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knew it. Then he burst forth anew in a torrent of words.

“What is this horrible power which you wield? How can you—how did you—force another into a sin? With her last dying breath she told me that she had no love for you, that she dreaded you, that her heart recoiled at thought of you—and yet you made her false to me. Her love was mine, I tell you, you devil in man’s form.”

‘He seemed about to fling himself upon me, as I lay, and tear my throat out; but still I faced him unflinchingly, and his eye wavered, and he forebore. But he went on in an ever-increasing frenzy,—

“You ruined her, you murdered her. But her love was mine, I tell you—mine! mine! mine!”

‘Then he paused for a little while—it seemed to me hours—during which I uttered no word.

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‘When he spoke again his voice was pregnant with sorrow, and he seemed to have forgotten my presence.

“*I* loved her. God! how I loved her! She was my wife, and the one woman in the world for me. Her life and happiness were more to me than all the earth—than hopes of heaven itself! My God! I cannot, cannot bear to think of what is, what was, and what should—but for that devil incarnate—have been.”

‘Despite his uncomplimentary allusion to me, I experienced a feeling of compassion for Hylton in his distress, and of compunction for the part that I had played. But it was only momentary, and passed away as swiftly as it had come.

‘He turned his eyes once more upon me. I met them instantly. He spoke in piteous bitterness,—

“*Thomas Trelawny, Tom, I trusted*

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you. I loved you. In the old days you were something more to me than brother. Tom, I then would willingly have died for you. I would have stood by your side and called you ‘friend’ if the world had spurned you. Had you robbed me of my money, aye, even of my good name, I would have tried to find excuses for you and would have forgiven you, Tom. But this—this—*this* evil that you have done me, *no man* could pardon. Oh, Tom! Tom! what ill have I ever wrought you that you should requite me with so base a wrong?”

‘I shifted uneasily upon the sofa. His anger I could bear with comparative equanimity; but I had not anticipated an appeal of this nature. Notwithstanding I kept a cold eye upon him, for I dared not look away lest his mood might change.

‘He came close to me and placed his hand upon my shoulder.

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“‘I wonder, Tom, if the world contains many such men as you! I wonder if one little spark of honour lies hidden in your heart! I almost wonder if you have a heart at all!’” Then he drew back—I still facing him—with his eyes full of reproach. “Did you think that you could *buy your happiness, her happiness*, at such a price? God! You will learn it. You will learn that agony, ignominy, and life-long remorse can only be purchased by such dishonour and such foul treachery.”

‘Cynic though I am, I faltered, wavered in my set purpose of silently facing him, and dropped my face in my hands. I knew that his mind was unhinged. I knew that his mood might change at any moment and that my eye had alone kept him from throttling me as I lay, but the minute soft side of my nature was touched. I felt that I had wronged him terribly,

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and so I helplessly buried my face in my hands.

‘It was his one opportunity; but for some reason, inexplicable to me, he failed to avail himself of it. The fool! He merely made use of words, words, words, when actions should (from his standpoint) have been his course.

“Hold up your head! Hold up your coward head, Thomas Trelawny!” he thundered. “Look me in the face and tell me that she lied to me upon her death-bed, tell me that *she* led you into sin! What? You will not?” Then came the bitter sneer. “Then there is *one little spark* of manliness in this libel upon manhood after all.”

‘I could not raise my head and face him. So yet his opportunity lay open for him. . . . And every instant I expected to feel his hands about my throat.

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Still those fingers, itching cruelly for my life-blood, did not touch me.

‘In another instant, concentrating all my powers of nerve, I had fixed his glaring eyes with an unwavering gaze.

‘He seemed to hesitate, to shrink, after a few minutes of this intense struggle for supremacy of will, and I knew that I had conquered.

‘He turned, as I willed he should do, and staggered blindly, with a choking sob, out of my presence.’

Anthony Grigg, although regarding the whole story as infamous on the part of his dead friend, could not refrain from mentally admiring that which he considered his splendid courage in facing the death which he had evidently seen was awaiting him in the eyes of the man whose faith he had betrayed.

The next entry concluded the drama.

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It was bald, concise, and condensed, yet it bore a fearful meaning.

‘Hylton was discovered dead in his chair this morning, with an empty phial, which had contained laudanum, upon the rug at his feet. Thus the life of one has been spared to search after and, possibly—is it possible?—attain truth.’

That one so false should search after truth! Oh, the hollow mockery of it all!

Forgetful of the fact that Thomas Trelawny had at least proved a faithful friend to himself in life and in death, Anthony Grigg cursed the day upon which they had met.

The iron heart of the diarist showed itself in a sentence, which, marked by the trade mark of the great, omnipotent Presence, had been inscribed a few days later, for it read:—

‘Despite my mishap, limping painfully,

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I made a point of being present at the double funeral which took place at Kegglewick parish church to-day.

“Ashes to ashes. Dust to dust.”

‘I shall devote my entire future to endeavouring to ascertain if this is the final fate of all humanity.’

Thomas Trelawny was morally guilty of the deaths of his two victims, yet, unmoved, he had actually been present at their interment. Callous and cold-blooded to the last had proved the wrecker of two human lives. And yet he had won the glorious prize of admission to hell!

The heart of Anthony Grigg pulsated with hope renewed. It seemed impossible to him that he could have forfeited the right of entry into the city of eternal, dazzling light; for his villainies were, compared to this, as the breeze is to the cyclone, as the shadows of evening

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are to the blackness of night, as the wavelets of a river are to the mountainous seas of the South Atlantic Ocean.

He rose from his chair in an ecstasy of delightful anticipation, and strutted to and fro, a ridiculous object, like a cock that had succeeded in finding its own long-lost dunghill.

But suddenly his peregrinations came to an abrupt cessation. The soul of Thomas Trelawny was actually in hell, he told himself, so then he must have worked out his expiation whilst yet in the flesh. There must be other marked passages in the diary for him to study.

Thereupon he resumed his seat and renewed his search.

Full many a page, covering a period of ten years, did he turn over ere he found another space of black groundwork and white calligraphy, and in this there was allusion to the preceding crime.

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‘Something, some inner force, prompted me to take train to Kegglewick to-day—the anniversary of the death of Eglantine—to view the grave which, through my act, was dug. I found the headstone covered with climbing wild roses—eglantine—all in pink and white bloom. I waited there until the sun was lost behind the horizon, and the shadows stretched across the green mounds, and the white of the eglantine’s bloom had become obscured in the rapidly-approaching darkness. I would live my life very differently could I but live it all over again; not that my views of life itself have altered, but because I see that our present high state of civilisation, our human laws, are but part and parcel—and necessary ones—of the wonderful science of evolution. I deeply wronged those two fellow-beings—those two now decayed forms. And—I have suffered.’

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A human note had at last been struck in the heart of the cynic, and Anthony Grigg found himself rejoicing that it was so. After all—whatever his infamy—Thomas Trelawny had been his friend for many, many years.

He was living beneath the same roof when he made this journey to the grave at Kegglewick, but he had never told him of the mission. He had suffered in silence.

Once more the philosopher proceeded to rapidly turn the pages of the diary. The next marked passage sent a thrill of expectation through the breast of the old man, for it did not bear upon the past subject, it was evidently the fore-runner of the act, or acts, of expiation.

‘Mrs Marston—the widow of the late vicar at the parish—called upon me to-day. She explained that she is in deep trouble. Her son—her sole support

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—the cashier of the well-known banking firm, Messrs Frogmore, Bond & Company—had given way to evil courses—betting, card-playing, and such-like ; had, as usual, lost ; had, as again is usual under such circumstances, made false entries in the books to cover up his tracks, and had appropriated still larger sums, until he found—as in similar cases it is with most men—that he had gone on step by step into a quagmire of crime. Then came the usual day of reckoning ; his employers discovered the false entries and the defalcations. The mother, who depends upon her son, is broken-hearted. The son, who supports that mother, is now at home, momentarily expecting to be arrested on the charge of theft. I am convinced that by a term of imprisonment — mixing with the lowest criminals — a man's whole career is blighted, his whole

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nature debased. For this reason, and because the workhouse and a broken-hearted future face the mother, I have consented to do my utmost to soften the announced resolve of the bankers. But why Mrs Marston should have come to *me*, above all people, in her dire distress, passes my comprehension!

‘Took train to B—— and had private interview with both Frogmore and Bond. They proved, as I expected, obdurate. The young fool’s defalcations amount to a good round sum—more than half my capital.

‘Went to my own bankers, drew a cheque for the exact sum (£4563), and again called upon Messrs F. B. & Co., and offered to make it over to them upon the sole condition that no proceedings should be taken against young Marston. Left my cheque, upon their promising to consider the matter (that

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is to say, find out if I am good for the amount), and to take no steps to arrest their late cashier for at least twenty-four hours.

‘Called upon Mrs Marston, saw the son, and spoke seriously from a worldly point of view. I am sufficient judge of character to see that he is bitterly repentant, and that this will be a lesson to him for life.’

Here the peculiar markings of the great, omnipotent Presence ceased. But the next day’s entry was once more in white upon a black ground. It ran:—

‘Saw Messrs Frogmore & Bond. They consented to my proposals *in toto*. Telegraphed the news to Mrs Marston.’

Diagonally across this was written in another hand, ‘Forgiven.’

The following day’s entry ran:—‘Have a rooted objection to receiving thanks,

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so did not call upon the Marstons. However, as I anticipated, they came here. I had to face them. The mother wept and called upon heaven to bless me. She meant it, poor creature. And the son thanked me in silence. There are the makings of a fine man in that young fellow. I do not think that he will slip again. The Marstons are unaware that I made good the stolen money. They imagine that I merely interceded on the son's behalf and was successful. I told him that, if ever he should be in a position to refund any of the money, he was to send it to Messrs Frogmore & Bond. They will of course remit it to me.'

Some pages further on, Anthony Grigg observed another marked passage.

'Booked tickets for the Marstons—upon an outward-bound steamer — to Australia. My old friend Chatbreeze, who has a large wool agency at Sydney,

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wrote me this morning, promising to take young Marston into his colonial employ. A letter to his manager there will precede the young man. The latter has a fair and honourable future before him, and his mother looks forward to days of peace. I am financially crippled. Still, I have enough to subsist upon ; and had I the past week or so to live over again, I would act as I have done. And I am a philosopher! Is this a philosophical act, or one of folly? What matters? This I know, that when a philosopher casts aside his philosophy and performs in so foolish a manner, he is at least happy in his foolishness.'

In vain did Anthony Grigg seek further traces of the hand of the great, omnipotent Presence. The remainder of the diary, right up to the evening preceding his friend's death, was uniformly in blue-black ink upon a white ground.

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‘So,’ he mused, as he closed the ponderous tome, the record of Thomas Trelawny’s eccentric and bizarre life, ‘he expiated his sin—the “wrecking of a human life”—by befriending the widow and dragging her son out of the quick-sands of crime in which he was already rapidly sinking. Have *I* done any such deed? Have *I* stepped out of my path to befriend *anyone*? ’ And swiftly reviewing the chief incidents in his own past career, he made answer aloud, in a hollow, mocking voice, as though he mocked himself, ‘No, thou fool! No!’ Hope and fear alternating in his breast seemed to play a game of see-saw with him. Now one was up and the other down, and a moment later the positions were reversed, only to be reversed again and again.

‘No, thou fool! No!’

Fear was for the instant high in the

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air. He had not performed any such act as that recorded by Thomas Trelawny and marked by the great, omnipotent Presence. Had he then debarred his soul the right of entry into hell, the everlasting city of eternally dazzling light?

Oh! horror of horrors! if it was so.

The sweat of terror oozed from every pore in his wrinkled skin. He put his hand up to his throat, gasping for breath, for he felt as though someone was choking him.

But with the strength of despair he mastered his palsied mind, and further reflection caused fear to sink and hope to gain the ascendancy.

This—this story of the Marstons—constituted his dead friend's *expiation*. The great, omnipotent Presence — of that ‘wonderful pity and compassion,’ of that ‘infinite mercy,’ of which the soul in hell

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had written—had *forgiven* Thomas Tre-lawny the earlier act of well-nigh unpardonable sin, because of this later one of so great human clemency. Through this, then, he had absolved the past and saved his soul from that hideous and irrevocable sentence, ‘Depart, O cursed soul, and go forth into limitless space, there to float without hope of escape, emancipation, or reprieve, from everlasting to everlasting,’ which, uttered at the gate of hell, whereon he knocked, would have, of a surety, caused him to give forth that prolonged, resounding shriek of hopeless agony that pulsates throughout the universe, making the very angels in hell to fall a-weeping.

If, therefore, he—Anthony Grigg—had not committed one of the tabulated sins, there would be no need of this absolving act of self-denial and mercy.

So the see-saw rested for a little while,

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with the hope end at the greater altitude.

But knowledge removes hope—which, after all, is but suspense to which fear is the first cousin,—and either kills it or swallows it up in certainty.

And he had knowledge at his right hand.

Thereupon, summoning what little courage hope had infused into his craven heart, he laid aside the heavy diary which he had been reading, and took up his own, a smaller volume.

Anthony Grigg had conceived the by no means uncommon idea of transmitting his daily doings to paper in the form of cryptographs, thus to baffle the eye of the inquisitive stranger who might at any time come across his diary during his absence or after his demise.

Yet the solution was easy in the extreme, for the philosopher had constructed

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his cryptograph upon the simplest basis, for his own convenience; and, moreover, it fully served his purpose, for—owing to his surroundings—only the ignorant were likely to attempt to indulge their curiosity in the matter, at least during his lifetime.

So he arranged that the letter H should take the place of A, I of B, J of C, K of D, and so on throughout the characters of the English alphabet. Thus:—

H=A	L=E	P=I	T=M	X=Q	B=U	F=Y
I=B	M=F	Q=J	U=N	Y=R	C=V	G=Z
J=C	N=G	R=K	V=O	Z=S	D=W	
K=D	O=H	S=L	W=P	A=T	E=X	

Opening the diary at the first page, the philosopher failed to discover the trademark of the great, omnipotent Presence, nor did he find the white characters upon the black indiarubber-like substance throughout the first five hundred leaves.

Upon reaching the 518th page, how-

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ever, his heart gave a great bound, and he drew in his breath sharply, clutching at the arms of his chair with his skinny, talon-like fingers. He reeled in mind and body, his soul sickening, his eyes dilating, his white locks standing suddenly upright, stiff as wires, his well-nigh toothless mouth contorting and then lapsing into a grin horrible to witness.

The cipher which drove, as with one powerful hammerstroke, so great a terror into his soul was necessarily even a briefer entry than any of those plainly-written ones which he had recently read in his dead friend's journal.

There seemed to be nothing very terrible in it, but—horrid truth!—the cryptograph was now of white characters upon that peculiar black substance, having been thus changed, since the philosopher had made the entry, by the great, omnipotent Presence, and diagonally, from

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the bottom left-hand corner to that of the top right-hand, ran the dreadful words, in free and graceful handwriting, ‘The wreck of a human life.’

Anthony Grigg read the bald and scarcely suggestive entry, in psychological agony.

‘Xbhyalylk ha Mpy Ayll Mhyt. Mpuk svknpunz jvtmvyahisl. Luhtvbylk vm aol ybyhs ilhbaf vm tpul ovzaz khbnoaly.’

Constant practice had perfected the philosopher in deciphering the meaning of his entries at a glance.

So he read out in a moaning voice, without so much as a look at the key,—

‘Quartered at Fir Tree Farm. Find lodgings comfortable. Enamoured of the rural beauty of mine host’s daughter.’

It only needed the apostrophe before the final letter s in ‘hosts’ to make the solution complete. The philosopher had purposely omitted to place this sign in the

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cryptograph, as its presence would have led to the discovery of the meaning of the letter z at once. This, coupled with the fact that e is the prevailing letter in nearly every English sentence, and that l occurred in the cryptograph ten times as against eight appearances of h and seven of v, and so on with other letters in a decreasing ratio, would naturally go far towards the solution of the meaning of at least two of the characters—viz.,, z=s, and l=e,—and presumably more, as a and o, in the order named, next occur most frequently, which would be no small point gained by anyone of ordinary acumen who desired to solve a riddle so simple.

The truth had come home to Anthony Grigg—he *had* been guilty of one of those tabulated sins which led to the soul's rejection of hell; he, like his late brother philosopher, had wrecked a human life, and, as is not seldom the case with

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men who suffer agonies when in doubt as to their ultimate fate, the first hideous pang of psychological pain over, he found himself calm in the full light of his terrible knowledge. He reviewed the whole situation with philosophical fortitude. He acknowledged that he had clutched at a floating straw when the relentless waves of Fact (not Fate, for his philosophy would not admit of the pre-ordination of aught, he believed solely in cause and effect. In his case his own sin was the cause, and his own punishment the effect) were closing over his hapless head. He admitted that he had *forgotten* the incident which led to his being designated ‘The Wrecker of a Human Life’ by the great, omnipotent Presence. And he owned to himself *why* his memory required thus sharpening; because, though a seeker after truth, he had been an egotist; because

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he thought no more of the sufferings of the fellow-creature whom he had wronged than the wolf considers the pain it inflicts upon the lamb it rends limb from limb.

He had no need to trace out — by reference to the marked passages in his diary in cypher—the whole story which lay hidden in the text that he had found, for it all revived in his memory as though it had been but yesterday. He re-lived the past; the wrong which he had done that sweet and trusting child—she was scarce a woman—at Fir Tree Farm.

He remembered without effort, but with a terrible self-reproach, how he had taught Dorothy Moore to love him, how at his desire they were wont to meet in secret, and how at last his sin, through the agency of her faith in and worship of himself, had led to her shame.

He remembered how earnestly, beseech-

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ingly, and at last despairingly, she had pleaded of him to save her from ignominy far worse than death to her sensitive woman's soul; to make what amends yet lay in his power by raising her to wifehood in the eyes of the world; and to rescue their unborn child from a nameless existence, from the scorn and contumely of those who in their pharisaical goodness made haste to cast the first stone.

Aye, he remembered almost every word she had uttered in her passionate despair, almost every gesture she had made, and the weeping tones of her voice. He seemed again to feel her white arms clasping his knees, to see her body prostrated at his feet and the look of pain in her beautiful blue eyes.

Oh! Woe! woe! woe! Would the memory, so suddenly awakened from the sleep of years, never depart from

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him? Would it cling to his soul throughout eternity? Was he destined to float with this terrible remembrance, throughout space, for everlasting? Would her face, her tones, her pleadings, her gestures, her—ah! they seemed *even now* to pierce his soul—*her eyes for ever haunt him?*

His calm had given way. He, too, was tasting of despair. She, in hers, had pleaded with him in vain. And—oh, damning truth!—it would be vain for him to plead for mercy from the great, omnipotent Presence; for, had it not been revealed to him that such sins, unless expiated on earth, put the perpetrator beyond the pale of redemption?

He put his hands before his eyes as though by such means to shut out the vision of Dorothy Moore's pale, lovely face—lovely even in her agony of soul. What shallow sophistry! What insensate folly! Was *he* a philosopher? He

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seemed to have lost all powers of reasoning. Fool that he was to attempt to shut his physical eyes to that which the mind saw! As well might he rub liniment upon his body to cure a psychological pain.

Ah! no! He could not hide her face, neither could he stifle memory! He must on, on, on, and review the long-buried past that now lay like a grinning skeleton in an open grave. At least he had one satisfaction—if such he might term it—there was little more to follow.

He remembered how he had ruined her—aye, that was the word—‘ruined’ her—and left her to face the world—friendless, spurned, an expectant mother and not a wife—*alone*.

He remembered hearing how her father—a religious man according to his own light—a man of stern, unbending

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will—had cast her out of the home of her childhood, in her frail state, penniless, with the pitiless words ringing in her ears, ‘I will never look upon your face again. Begone, woman! I have no daughter now.’

And he—Anthony Grigg—had done nothing for her.

Of her fate he knew nothing. Perhaps she crept to the workhouse—the refuge of the homeless paupers. Perhaps she had died. Perhaps—ah! horrid thought! —hers being ‘a wrecked life’—she had slain herself and her unborn babe. And, if so, he was then morally her murderer. Truly he had earned the title of The Wrecker of a Human Life!

Again he put his hands before his eyes to hide from them the sight of her face, and again he recognised how futile, how childish, was the action.

So he dropped his trembling, sweating

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hands, and with ‘her’ face ever before him, took up his diary and turned the pages as rapidly as his nerveless fingers would permit, until he came to the final entry concerning Dorothy Moore.

Therein lay the horrible key to his wanton wickedness.

‘Slma mpy ayll mhyt tf lewlyplujl dpaō
kvyvaof tvvyl wyvclk tyza puāylzapun
wzfjovsvnpjhs lewlyptlua.’

Which, being interpreted, ran:—

‘Left Fir Tree Farm. My experience with Dorothy Moore proved most interesting psychological experiment.’

In this last entry, then, the *motive* of his sin was revealed. He had formed the hideous design to ruin an inoffensive girl as a psychological experiment.

What later act could he have committed to redeem his lost soul? He vainly strove to remember one deed of self-denial, one act of overwhelming charity.

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No! No! No! It was impossible to call to mind that which had never been. He had *not* expiated his sin. His friend's soul had passed through hell's portals, but his own was doomed to everlasting unrest. And would 'her' accusing eyes forever gaze upon him? Would 'her' face perpetually confronting him be a part of his already unbearable punishment? It seemed that such was to be his eternal fate. It seemed that there was no hope of redemption.

Once again, in a paroxysm of acutest terror, he fell upon his knees and prayed of the great, omnipotent Presence to alleviate the intensity of his sufferings; prayed—ah! how earnestly! how despairingly!—that Satan would point out a way by which he might yet, while the faint spark of life still flickered in his lacerated breast, redeem his doomed soul.

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But not again did that voice of super-human melody break dulcetly upon his ear. Not again did that sweet sad sound, as of the weeping of a chorus of angels, arrest his hearing. Not again did that wonderful shaft of dazzling light penetrate the squalid chamber, striking him momentarily blind. Not again did the atmosphere become warm and life-giving, perfumed with subtle and delicious fragrance. Not again did he hear the soft, rushing sound, as of wings beating the air; not again was his hair stirred by such motion.

Nay. All was silent. All was still. No answer came. No sign was given.

Soul and body shivered at the thought that the great, omnipotent Presence had revealed all unto him, and by his silence implied that hope there was none for his tortured mind.

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And *still* Dorothy Moore's pleading, wondering, reproachful eyes seemed to gaze upon his prostrate form.

With another sickening shudder—which shook him as a gust of wind will shake a sapling—he feverishly clasped his hands together and prayed of ‘her,’ his victim, to intercede with Satan upon his behalf.

But not a sound—save that of his own muttered prayer—was to be heard.

Oh! terror of terrors! He felt that he could no longer face it. The loss of entry into that everlasting city of dazzling light and the gain—gain! bah! the vile irony of the term!—the gain of infinite unrest. Yet he dared not terminate his own existence, dared not sleep the sleep of death, for the awaking to immortality meant everlasting pain. Ah! had but the great, omnipotent Presence suffered him to remain in

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ignorance, at least he would have spared him this prior torture. ‘Ah-h-h-h! Surely,’ he said in his agony, ‘such refinement of cruelty is the work of fiends !’

Then he cursed and swore, beating his head and tearing his hair, and every now and again shrieking in the extremity of his dread, until, overcome bodily and mentally, he fell forward in a state of insensibility.

When his overwrought brain recovered he crawled to his chair and struggled painfully into it.

The see-saw was once again in motion. Hope was slowly rising. Might there not be another marked passage in his diary? Might he not have expiated his sin? Although he had no recollection of any crowning act of goodness in his

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own past, still it was just possible that he had saved his soul.

Eagerly, frantically, he turned the pages—but he sought that which was not there to find.

P A R T I V

THE PHILOSOPHER'S FATE

THE following day the wretched man, Anthony Grigg, arose after a sleepless night, during which the pangs of anticipated torment—the torment of eternal unrest—rocked him mercilessly.

The see-saw of hope and fear was still moving upon its axis within his mind. Fear held him all through the hours of darkness; but with the rosy light of morning came hope.

'While there is life there is hope' is an old maxim, and it proved peculiarly applicable in his case, for were he to die without expiating the sin which, through its committal, debarred his soul

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the right of entry into hell, his fate would be sealed. It therefore behoved him to do all in his mortal power to prolong his now miserable life, and to do that which *might* avert his soul's rejection of hell, right speedily.

So he made haste to wash and dress himself, mixed and drank a powerful tonic, and seating himself at his writing-table, rapidly sketched out an advertisement for insertion in all the daily papers. Then the trembling, decrepid creature made his way down the creaking stairs, through Drury Lane into the Strand, and there sought out an advertising agent, paying the fees, and instructing the dapper young clerk to lose no time in obtaining the insertion of the advertisement, which ran as follows, in the various agony columns:—

‘To Dorothy Moore. Thirty - two

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years ago of Fir Tree Farm, —shire. Communicate with Anthony Grigg (c/o. Messrs Ads. & Com., Strand, W.C.), who desires to right the wrong.'

'If she is alive—if only she is yet alive,' he kept muttering to himself, as he made his way towards the place he called home. 'If only she is yet alive and *reads the advertisement*, she will come to me, and I will make what amends lie in my power, and perchance may save my immortal soul.'

Ah! that dread 'if'! It shook him with fear and it buoyed him up with hope. Now his footsteps lagged, he seemed scarce able to drag his senile limbs along, and anon his step was free, agile as the step of healthy youth, and his dim eyes brightened, shining lustrously, and, again, a moment later hope fled and he was filled with dread.

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He looked casually at the shop windows, and in one and all he fancied that he saw 'her' pale, pleading, beautiful face. He raised his eyes skywards, 'her' face was there. He cast them down upon the pavement, still 'her' face looked up at him. He closed them and stood 'still, clutching a lamp-post for support, yet he saw 'her.' Look where he might, do as he would, he could no more close the windows of his mind than he could arbitrarily force the power of thought to cease its action. 'Her' face haunted him.

Perchance he might save his immortal soul. *Perchance.* Aye, if he found her, he might yet be *unable* to expiate his sin. What if it should prove beyond his power to bring back to innocence the life that he had wrecked? What if she had sunk so low that she neither cared nor dared to raise herself, though

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he begged it of her, grovelling at her tainted feet? What—

Oh! the torture of the supposition! His senses whirled. His brain was aflame.

Someone took him by the arm. It was a constable. He spoke kindly to the old philosopher. He could see that it was not drink which had overpowered him. Maybe he thought it was constitutional weakness, for at that moment Anthony Grigg looked a mere travesty of man.

‘You want a drop of brandy,’ he said.
‘Have you got any money?’

The wretched creature looked up at his interlocutor dazedly. Then he put his hand into his pocket and drew forth a little bag. It contained gold.

There was a public-house close at hand, and the constable assisted him to the door. Anthony Grigg staggered up

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to the bar and hoarsely demanded a glass of the best Hennessy's; he paid for it, drank it neat at one draught, and, much revived, made his way back into the street.

The constable was awaiting his return.

'Now, if I were in your place,' he said, 'I should take a cab home.'

'Thank you. I will,' replied the philosopher.

By a motion of the hand the constable brought a cab to the spot.

Anthony Grigg made a step forward as though to enter the vehicle, then drew back shuddering. He thought he saw 'her' sitting within, smiling as once, years ago, she had smiled upon him. Then overmastering this purely psychological fear, by an effort of will-power he put his foot upon the step, raised himself, with the constable's assistance, and sank back in the seat.

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‘Drury Lane,’ he gasped. ‘I will tell you when to stop.’

When the cabman drew rein at Anthony Grigg’s bidding, the rag-picker stood at the door of the dwelling. Her keen grey eyes stared from out their grimy environs, in utter amazement, to see her fellow-lodger—one whom she had always considered an eccentric old miser—indulging in such an unwonted luxury.

‘Bli-me,’ she muttered, as the philosopher descended and paid the fare, ‘I’d a’ laid me life ’e’d a’ sooner gone to ‘ell than ’ave rode in a ‘ansom.’

She little knew what grim truth lay in her remark.

A moment later, seeing how terribly ill he looked, she was assisting the old man’s tottering footsteps to ascend the equally unstable stairs.

In the afternoon, summoning what

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slight physical strength remained to him, Anthony Grigg hurried out and secured a copy of all the evening papers, and, to his intense relief, found that his 'agony' paragraph had been inserted in each.

And when morning came he pottered into the dirty, evil-smelling street and purchased all the dailies, his eager search meeting with similar results.

Then he made his way to Messrs Ads. & Com., the agents; but in answer to his query the dapper young clerk informed him that no letter awaited him. So, grappling ever less and less strongly with his despair, he trudged down Essex Street to the Embankment, and sat down upon his accustomed seat, with his eyes wistfully fixed upon the blue skies, whereon he saw the face of Dorothy Moore framed in a garland of fleecy white clouds.

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Had he been asleep? Surely he must have dozed? *He* had not heard that despairing scream.

A hoarse murmuring of excited voices, a rush of many trampling feet, awakened him.

He threw his nodding head back with a sudden jerk, to espy a London crowd —which gathers instantly from one knows not where — thronging the steps hard by the Needle, crowding the pavement, and hanging over the parapet.

‘He’s got her!’ ‘No; she’s struggling with him.’ ‘They’re under!’ ‘They’ll both drown!’ came the hurly-burly from a score of throats.

The clamorous din brought the dazed philosopher to his feet. The element of excitement took forcible possession of him. He fought his way forward through the throng, with the ability of a momentary and spasmodic accession

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of strength, unmindful of the buffeting which he received on all sides.

He reached the top of the steps as a ringing cheer broke from the crowd.

The people fell back on either hand to make a passage for four men and ‘something’ that they bore in their arms, and Anthony Grigg found himself in the foremost rank.

‘She did it a-purpose. I seen her jump in. She’s a suicide; that’s wot she is,’ he heard a street urchin exclaim in a piping voice.

The ‘something’ is borne up the stairs.

Anthony Grigg can see it plainly now. One of the bearers is dripping wet. The mournful, though excited, procession passes so close to him that the water drips upon his feet. It is a woman’s form within the men’s arms. A woman’s form—but ah! how motionless! He takes in every

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detail. The saturated garments ‘clinging like cerements’; the wide-open eyes ‘staring so blindly’; the loosened hair from which the water runs in streams; the pale, deathly pale face and the bluish parted lips.

‘Is she drowned? Will they fail to resuscitate her?’ he mentally questions. ‘And, if so, will neither heaven nor hell accept her? Is that frail creature’s soul destined to eternal unrest?’

He leans forward, peering closely at the stiffening form, with a strange look in his hunted eyes. He touches the clammy hand that hangs down white and cold. Then he draws back shuddering.

He fancies that those impassive features are ‘hers’!—Dorothy Moore’s!

With a terrible pain at his heart, with a sickening sense of fear, he scrutinises them yet more earnestly. Is it—can it be ‘She’?

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The men lay the body down upon the pavement, and a constable comes forward and attempts the revival of respiration by artificial means.

For fully twenty minutes the rigid arms are moved to and fro. But no sign of life appears. Not the faintest of sighs passes the open lips.

There is a medical man amongst the crowd. He steps forward, examines the body, and pronounces life to be extinct.

Shudder after shudder thrills through Anthony Grigg. It is—it surely is—the poor, drowned body of Dorothy Moore. Age has altered her, sin has marked her, death has changed her—but still the features are those of the woman whose *life he has wrecked!*

Someone, a woman, approaches, and kneeling beside her erring sister—whose sins are now so certainly of the past—reverently draws the lids over the sight-

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less yet staring eyes, and folds the white hands upon the dripping bosom of her dress.

Ah! Now! now! now! now that the eyes are closed so that she looks as though sleeping; now that death has removed the wrinkles, and the marks of sin and pain, the philosopher's doubts become swallowed up in certainty. *It is Dorothy Moore*—what is left of her—who lies before him so still and cold.

He staggers forward in an agony of terror. Doomed! doomed! doomed! The great, omnipotent Presence has thought fit to send him an answer—what an answer—to his advertisement.

A rough though friendly hand seizes him and saves him from falling prone upon his face.

‘To the mortuary.’ The words seem to momentarily revive him by their terrible significance. He looks up with

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quivering eyelids—like a hunted felon—and espies the wreckage, wrought by his own hand, being placed on the police ambulance. A gentleman, standing near, quotes to his companion,—

‘One more Unfortunate,
Weary of breath,
Rashly importunate,
Gone to her death !’

then turns upon his heel, and they both stroll on. It is only an incident in the great hub of life, to *them*.

Aye! gone to her death! And he, Anthony Grigg, is morally guilty of it.

Hitherto, terror as to his own fate had alone held him. Now, remorse, awakened by the sight of ‘her,’ by their meeting, struck him dumb. What pain, ignominy, poverty, and despair must she have suffered to bring her to this?

Silently, with a face as immobile as

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though carved out of stone, he stole home to his garret.

He had found her, *too late* to expiate his sin.

In the evening the papers published a full and graphic account of the gallant attempt at rescue of a suicide, and further stated that an examination of the deceased's linen, at the mortuary, revealed the marking, 'Dorothy Moore.'

The movement of the philosopher's mental see-saw had ceased. Hope rested at the base, and fear was at the apex.

The philosopher lay tossing feverishly upon the couch from which he was destined to rise no more. There were

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two other occupants of the cheerless room. The one was the rag-picker, and the other the young clergyman whose self-appointed mission it was to attend and minister to the dregs of humanity whether in health or sickness.

Every now and again the rag-picker plied the doomed man with a cooling mixture, whilst the clergyman spoke in earnest tones of the life to come.

For a little while the words seemed to have no effect upon Anthony Grigg. It was as though he heard nothing—as though his whole power of thought was concentrated upon something unknown to his two attendants.

But suddenly his closed eyes opened. He seemed lashed to frenzy by the exhortation of the priest.

'I am the Resurrection and the Life,' the latter quoted solemnly.

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‘Aye!’ the dying man cried. ‘Eternal life! Eternal unrest! A living death for everlasting!’

‘Nay! nay! There is hope for you—hope for one and all. To such as repent them of their sins—’

‘O fool! I tell you there is *no hope* for me,’ he shrieked.

‘God is merciful. The gates of heaven are wide, my brother, my dying brother.’

‘Heaven! Heaven! Who spoke of heaven? I tell you *hell* is not for me. . . . Not for me. . . . The gates of that eternal city of dazzling light are closed against me. . . . I must float—must float through space for ever and ever and ever. . . . Do you hear me? . . . For ever, I say, for ever!’ . . .

His voice, shrill and piercing from the first, worked into a final shriek, ‘*For ever!*’ Then he sank back, ex-

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hausted, upon the pillow, his face waxing whiter, his eyeballs protruding horribly, his features contorting in a hideous manner.

The rag-picker stepped forward and forced a glass of the cooling medicine between his blue and shrivelled lips. Even *she*, used to all kinds of horrid spectacles, shuddered as she gazed upon him.

The clergyman held his peace. Surely this dying sinner must be mad, he told himself. What hallucination could he be labouring under? Whence came this strange theory which possessed the philosopher's mind—this theory of a soul's rejection of hell, the sulphurous furnace for the eternal punishment of unrepentant sinners?

When the dying man spoke again his voice still thrilled with agony, but his tones were subdued almost to a whisper.

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'I wronged you, Dorothy,' he gasped. 'Forgive me . . . forgive me. Plead with him for my sake, Dorothy. . . . Plead with the great, omnipotent Presence. . . . If your soul is in hell, Dorothy, plead, and pray him—for the memory of the love that you once bore me—that I too may enter.'

He interlaced his twitching fingers as though in prayer.

The clergyman thought he saw his opportunity. 'You spoke of the great, omnipotent Presence, of the Almighty Being, of God Himself, who alone can forgive us our trespasses,' he began softly, encouragingly.

'God! What have I to do with God? I am *debarred* heaven. It is only the great, omnipotent Presence to whom I look for forgiveness. It is to Satan that I must turn. And it is in vain. I have committed one of

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the tabulated sins. The gates of hell are shut. I may not enter. . . . O Presence, O ruler of hell, my punishment is more than I can bear!'

Once more he sank back exhausted. And mentally he pictured the closing of hell's portals, mentally he went through the fate of his doomed soul.

And his spiritual adviser, who came to lead this strayed soul heavenwards, shrank away in terror and momentary, irrepressible loathing. But he shook off the latter feeling—was he not responsible before heaven for this lost soul?—and sank upon his knees, praying aloud for the dying man's deliverance from the devil.

When he had concluded, the unimpressionable rag-picker muttered a fervent 'Amen.' Then the clergyman turned to the philosopher, laying his hand gently upon his feverish forehead,

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saying, ‘My brother, will you pray with me?’

Again the Wrecker of a Human Life, whose own soul seemed so surely wrecked, struggled to a sitting posture. His glazing eyes took to themselves a fresh flash of light—like a flickering candle burnt low in the socket—firing up with an almost superhuman brilliance. ‘Are you here to taunt me, to torture me?’ he cried. And after a pause he broke out in a strangely-subdued voice, yet ringing with accents of the acutest terror, ‘Can’t you hear the great, omnipotent Presence? Can’t you hear his sorrowful tones? . . . Listen! . . . Listen! . . .—He put his shrivelled hand to the lobe of his ear and bent forward in a crouching position.—‘Listen! . . . Ah-h-h-h! My soul is doomed! . . . doomed, I say. . . . Can’t you hear the hideous command in such soft, devilish

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tones? . . . There it is again—"Depart, O cursed soul, and go forth into limitless space, there to float, without hope of escape, emancipation, or reprieve, from everlasting to everlasting." . . . Oh, save me! save me! save me! . . . Dorothy, put out your hand! . . . Save me! . . . Spare my soul! O Presence, spare my soul! . . . Trelawny! where are you? . . . It is all so dark, and I can hear the shrieks and the mocking jeers of souls that are lost.' . . .

His voice from sheer exhaustion became silent.

The rag-picker gazed upon his leering eyes, his contorting mouth, and his swaying form, like one spellbound.

Suddenly the dying man broke the stillness by a hard, unnatural laugh. 'Ha! ha! ha! Can't you see the light? . . . Ah! now the music sounds like weeping—the light has turned to darkness. . . .

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The angels are weeping for *my soul*.
I am lost! *lost!! lost!!!*'

The sweat hung in beads upon his clammy brow. He smote himself upon the breast, clenching his fists in an agony of dread. Then he raised his right hand above his head, as though he would strike the great, omnipotent Presence; and he broke into a string of horrid, blood-curdling oaths and blasphemies.

The clergyman thrust his fingers into his ears and fell upon his knees beside the bed.

At last the philosopher's wild curses ceased. Physical weakness had tied his tongue. In the calmness of despair—which came as a sudden reaction—he realised that his life was swiftly ebbing; realised that but a few minutes—perhaps seconds—remained for his soul to occupy its fleshly tenement.

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He gasped for breath, yet he fought death to the last.

'*I am dying!*' he shrieked. '*I am—DYING!*'

'God of His infinite mercy—' the clergyman began in a clear, earnest voice.

'*I won't! I can't! I dare not die!*' the philosopher shouted with a sudden and last accession of strength. '*I won't! I WON'T!*'

He sprang to his feet with the agility born of terror complete and mastering, all his muscles forming into hard knots. His staring eyes were fixed upon the ceiling; he clenched his fist and shook it threateningly.

'I defy—'

The rag-picker made a rapid forward movement to grasp him by the arm. But there was no longer need of her assistance.

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With a terrible shriek of woe, which penetrated the house from top to basement and flooded the street, Anthony Grigg fell back, his head crashing upon the bed-rail, his muscles relaxing, his eyes rolling, his tongue lolling out amidst a yellow froth.

His eyes moved once, twice, thrice, from left to right and back again; he strove to speak, gave one convulsive struggle and then lay still.

The philosopher — the searcher after truth — had solved the great mystery. He was dead.

The Master Sinner had slain him!

And immediately there rose a fearful shriek of agony, such as mortal ear has never before heard, which resounded throughout the entire universe.

And all humanity shuddered and trembled with terror.

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Subsequently scientists ascribed it to a universal atmospheric disturbance caused by the sudden disappearance of a burning planet; but perchance it was the shriek of the soul of Anthony Grigg, which had been rejected of hell and doomed to float, restless, hopeless, homeless, throughout the infinite realms of space, for all eternity.

But again, perchance it was the shriek of his soul upon rejection of *heaven* and upon an enforced entry into the *hell of everlasting fire and brimstone*. For, yet again, perchance those letters which Anthony Grigg received from hell may have been but another wile of Satan, The Master Sinner, to capture one more soul to place with the multitude already in the bottomless pit. Who can tell?

Before the mortal remains of the philosopher were removed, the rag-picker

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made haste to appropriate all those articles in his room which she considered might possess a fair marketable value.

But owing to her ignorance she left undisturbed the Letters from Hell and the two diaries as practically valueless.

So 'the coroner's officer found them; and when the coroner sat (with twelve good men and true) upon the professor's body, he read them.

And the coroner asked himself were these letters true, or were they only the outcome of some novelist's brain?

And he said to himself, as well as to the jury, 'After all, what does it matter? Is anyone persuaded of such people as these?'

Five months later the Pope read the letters, and also of the effect that they had upon Anthony Grigg.

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But he did not shrivel up till he appeared as a mummy.

He merely remarked, ‘This is not the first time that a fictionist has attempted to base a tale of lies upon old truths. The Holy Mother Church still lives.’

Then he paused and mused, ultimately stretching forth his thin right hand. ‘Nevertheless,’ said he, ‘I decree that the reprint of those letters shall be placed upon the Index.’

THE END

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